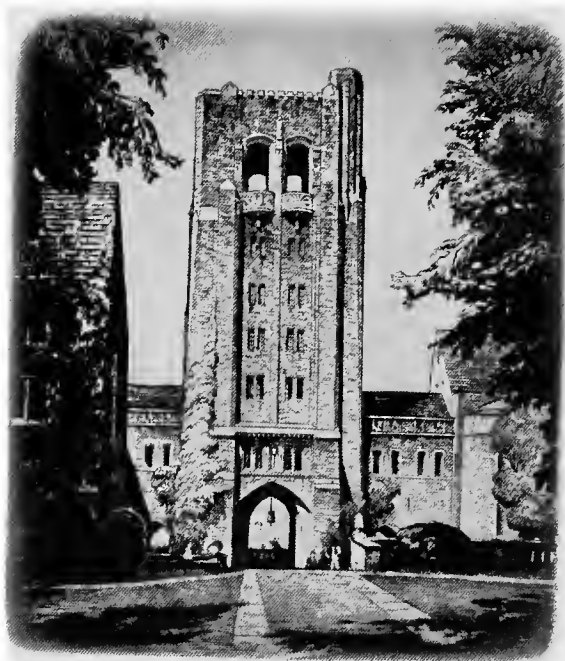


THE WORLD SHUT OUT



By
NORVAL RICHARDSON

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BY
NORVAL RICHARDSON

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I

IL Signor Avvocato Giacomo Torrecella, to give his resonant name and supplement of titles in full, resorted to a homely and very human gesture: he scratched his head. Who wouldn't, per Bacco, with a letter like this in the hand! It was most frightfully disturbing; it was even shocking. More than that, it was going to shake Signor Torrecella out of the comfortable, serene existence which his more than sixty years demanded.

He sighed deeply and continued the homely and human gesture.

It was now eight years since his sentimental and imaginative nature had been torn asunder by a most painful experience. Eight years! But he had got through it rather successfully, on the whole. Yes, quite successfully. But, now, here it was, all over again. Try as hard as you might, you could never bury the past. It was always

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rising up and facing you in the most disconcerting way. Dio mio, and women—how they pestered one! The more you loved them the more they pestered you. Yes, he loved her. If she had been his own child he couldn't have loved her more. The joy of seeing her would offset the pain of her coming under such questionable circumstances.

His frowns ended in a smile. He picked up the letter and read it again. It was dated in London.

"Caro Amico," it ran. "I am coming back to Italy. I am leaving on the train which follows this letter. When you read it I shall be in Rome, awaiting you, impatiently awaiting you, at the Grand Hotel. I wonder how long it will take you to come to me! I shall give you two hours. My train arrives at ten. If you are not at the hotel by noon I shall come rushing to you. If you do come, and I know you will, ask for Mrs. Francis. That is the name under which I shall appear in Rome. It will save so much annoyance, so many tiresome questions, the seeing of tiresome people. I suppose there are some stuffy people still there who would be interested in looking me up—simply

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out of curiosity if nothing else. But I don't want to see anyone but you—and the villa. Of course you are wondering how I have the heart to return to Italy. I do too. But the call is irresistible. I must. Remember, while you are reading this, I am patiently awaiting you."

Signor Torrecella put down the letter and looked at his watch. *Accidente!* It was already twenty minutes to twelve. When he put on his hat his hand was visibly trembling.

A trim, English maid, not speaking a word of Italian, opened the door to him and showed him into a sitting room.

"Madame is awaiting you, sir; she will come at once."

He looked about the room anxiously. It was not at all the sort of place in which he expected to find her. To his Italian eyes it seemed strange and very foreign; and already it had taken on an air of personality that made it very far removed from an hotel apartment. There were dainty embroidered pillows on the sofa; there were several

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vases of flowers; there were some evidently much read books; and there was a large photograph of a woman in a silver frame on the table with a bowl of marigolds beside it; there was even a very faint fragrance everywhere that suggested the intimate presence of a charming woman. Not a Latin woman, no! Signor Torrecella shook his head. No, it was indefinably different from anything he had expected. And he was vastly troubled. Had eight years in foreign lands made her into some strange being whom he was going to find unsympathetic and beyond comprehension? He knew so little of foreigners; he had always found them difficult, even disturbing. Their ideas were always extraordinary and a bit mad. Would hers be? Santa Pazienza!

She was standing before him before he was aware that she had entered the room, holding out both hands to him and smiling through tears. How beautiful she was!—in her trailing black draperies which made her seem wonderfully tall and stately! And her great dark eyes, dimmed with tears!

Torrecella grasped her hands and bowed over

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them and raised them to his lips. He couldn't remember ever having been so agitated. Then, when he looked at her again, she was nearer to him and holding her cheek up to be kissed. He, still trembling—per Bacco, what an old man he was becoming!—performed the salutation and found the other cheek awaiting his lips. Tears were in his eyes now. They were both weeping.

“We are not going to be babies, Torrecella.”

How her voice brought everything back to him! Eight years surely could not have passed!

“But we can't help being human beings,” he answered in a shaking voice. “We can't help remembering.”

She turned from him and sank down on the sofa and nodded towards the chair near her. He gazed at her a little longer and finally smiled. Now she was not so tall nor so stately. Seated she was much smaller, much more herself, much more the girl he remembered. It must have been that somber trailing gown which had made him think her changed. She wasn't changed at all. Yes, a little older, a little more the woman of the world, but

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all this only outwardly. At heart she was still the same little girl he had loved.

"We are *not* going to remember, Torrecella." She reached for his hand and pressed it. "We are going to look forward. That is the only way to be happy."

"You *are* happy?"

She looked towards the photograph of the woman on the table and smiled, not a smile of gaiety, rather a smile of ineffable tenderness. "Yes, she made me happy. She taught me how to be. One must learn, you know. When she died I promised her that I would go on being happy, being happy myself, and making others so. That is why I have come back to Italy."

The worried look sprang again into Torrecella's eyes. He sensed the approach of those mad foreign ideas. As if one could learn to be happy unless life let one be! What under the sun was she leading up to? Surely Italy was the last place in the world for *her* to be happy in!

"Now don't shake your head before you know what I mean to do."

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But there was so much that he must tell her first. Where should they begin?—at the Principessa's death, perhaps—and had he yet heard from the American who had inherited the estate? Question followed question until poor Torrecella felt his head whirling.

When she had asked him every question that could possibly have entered a sane or insane woman's head she sank farther back on the sofa and looked at him as though she expected answers to come as easily.

Torrecella cleared his throat and attempted the impossible. Surely they should begin with the Principessa's death, as that was the most important event which had occurred. Her testament left everything to the only remaining member of the family—at least the only remaining member as far as the world knew.

“Have you heard from him?”

He had, only that day. The letter was in his pocket at that moment. She asked if she might see it. When she returned it to him her eyes were clouded.

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"I thought—I hoped he might not come."

Not come when he was inheriting one of the largest estates in Italy! What made her have such a silly thought?

"He knows nothing about Italy; he has never been here; his mother died at his birth. There is nothing to make him love it."

"But the rents! You forget that the income is enormous. It will surely appeal to an American."

"When do you think he will arrive?"

"Within the month, the letter says."

"Then I have a month to the advantage."

There it was again, this mad plan of hers that was stirring in her mind. Torrecella got up and walked the floor. He wanted to know what it was and yet he hated to know. Uncertainty might be better than knowledge. He stopped before her and stared down at her much as he would have stared at some willful uncontrolled child. Indeed, that is what she was, despite her look of experience and worldly knowledge, a mere child determined upon some impossible adventure.

"Cara mia," he said in answer to her upturned

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face. "What are you up to? What does it all mean? Why have you come back to Italy?"

Her eyes silently reproved him, and for a few moments she sat with her hands clasped idly in her lap, meeting his glance with an indefinable depth of tragedy in her face that smote him.

"I couldn't help coming back, Torrecella. Everything in me called to me to return. I know now that I have been waiting for this moment ever since I went away. There is one spot in the world that calls to me always—you know what I mean—the little Campo Santo in the olive groves on the slopes of the Alban Hills. My heart is there. It always will be. I said I had forgotten, but I haven't. I never shall. I have come back to live—and die here."

Torrecella took out his handkerchief. At last her secret was out and it was even worse than he had expected. Come back to live in Italy! Madonna Santissima! She had gone stark mad!

"But you can't live here!"

"Why not—as an English woman? No one will know me. I shall preserve my incognito always."

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"But, but where will you live?"

"At the villa—of course. Where else should I live?"

"Santa Pазienza! How can you live there when it now belongs to an American?"

"Ah, there is where I need your help. How am I to get possession of it? You are a lawyer; you must know the way to go about it."

Signor Torrecella sat down and groaned.

That evening he dined meagerly in his solitary apartment in old Rome and afterwards went up to the terrace and walked there far into the night. He saw nothing about him; he was as unconscious of the brooding dome of St. Peter's, of the sinister mass of San Angelo, of the fast flowing dark Tiber, as if they were not all there before him. He saw only what he termed the fantastic adventure she had planned and asked him to carry out for her. Of course he could not refuse to aid her; she knew that before she told him anything. He was as wax in her hands. But what was it going to lead to? Surely some sinister disaster,

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he was certain of that. *Madonna mia!* First, she wanted him to arrange for her to rent the little casino in the magnolia grove adjoining the villa. That was easy enough, as the Principessa had been accustomed for years to let it to foreigners. He could explain to the American when he came that this had been the custom. So far so good. Then she wanted him to plan with this unknown American, who no doubt would speak not a word of Italian, to sell the villa—to her. She wanted it to live in—all very well—but more than that she wanted it so as to turn it into a school for orphans—a place where forsaken children would be taken in, given a home, and, as she had put it, made happy. An entirely preposterous plan for a young and beautiful woman! He had opposed the idea with all his strength. To begin with, he was sure the American would not think of selling the villa. She scoffed at this excuse. Of course he would sell it. It could not possibly mean anything to him. He would consider her offer a wonderful chance to get it off his hands. She would make the price interesting; she was rich enough to do

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that. And just here Torrecella put his finger on what he considered the dangerous spot. She was rich and consequently could put fantastic dreams into realities. Too much money was a curse. She would find that out when it was too late. Arguments and reason availed nothing. She was every bit as determined and fixed in her ideas as the Principessa had been. Then, to make the situation all the more vastly disturbing, after she had told this to him, she had explained that it was only what she planned. The only definite thing she wanted at the moment was to go straight to the casino, the next day, if you please, and install herself there before the American owner arrived. After that she would have plenty of time to judge of the best way of approaching him. The main thing was for her to be there before he arrived. Why? She offered no satisfactory explanation. Of course, like all women, she had told him only half the truth; but he had not lived more than half a century for nothing. He would tell her that to-morrow and wash his hands of the whole questionable proceeding unless she came out

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frankly and told him what was really in her mind.

He threw away his cigar and went down to his room. He had known it was going to be a disturbing day—and it had been. He was uncommonly tired, really worn out. And still there was something awaiting him, a letter from her on his table.

“You left rather worried and bothered to-day. I am full of regrets. But I have no one else to turn to. Surely you are not going to forsake me. But you never have. Why should I doubt you now! And forgive me when you see how happy I shall be in Italy!”

Of course he was not going to forsake her, though he saw no more peace ahead of him. If she were happy in Italy he would be happy too. Though she would not be; she could not. There was no happiness possible for any member of her accursed family.

II

FIRST impressions are so much a matter of one's mood at the moment that one is bound to admit, upon later and calmer judgment, that they are usually unfair. If one is tired and hot and dusty and confoundedly bored—all of which Galbraith was—one can't possibly view anything favorably; the jeweled gates of a fairy city would not appear inviting under such circumstances. Besides, Galbraith was prejudiced, unfavorably. He hadn't wanted to make the trip. The whole affair was an infernal nuisance. Now that he had actually arrived he wondered why under the sun he had come. He didn't have to, there was no one to make him, he was surely his own master, it could have been arranged in some fashion, there are always lawyers to do such things for one, and yet the fact remained that he had come. Indeed, he was there, at the journey's end.

The unspeakable road over which he had just

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journeyed, the hired motor, the careless chauffeur, the dust! Good heavens, the dust! Did it never rain in this forsaken land! Even the olive groves were white with the gritty powder. Then the village perched on the side of a mountain, the endless climb up a road shut between high walls, the crumbling, shabby houses which couldn't possibly have been painted for centuries, and finally the Piazza with a few, scraggy plane trees, a fountain in the centre and at least a thousand — there couldn't have been one less—ragged, screaming urchins who ran after the motor and actually had the cheek to hang on the mud guards! Then, at last, at one side of the Piazza, a high wall, two heavy stone pillars and an iron gate through which nothing could be seen, as the spaces between the elaborate grill were filled with strips of wood. It was for all the world like a gaol, a prison, a place where criminals were thrown and left to perish. And the heat! A little more and the sun would come down and burn up what it had already parched.

Galbraith drew a long breath, stood up, at-

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tempted to shake some of the dust from him, gave it up as hopeless and got out of the motor.

A heavy iron knocker confronted him. He lifted it and frowned as the weird design caught his attention. A dragon with a human face—a woman's face! There was something leering about it; leering, sinister, ominous. He let it fall and turned away, still frowning.

An answer came in the sound of footsteps. A chain jangled and fell to the pavement; a bolt, heavy, rusty, complaining, was shot back; a key grated in the lock; and at last the gate moved, trembled as though in fear, and swung back.

Through the opening Galbraith's glance jumped quickly to the view within. It was like spring water to the parched lips of a desert traveller. He gave slight attention to the custodian who was bowing profoundly and offering fine sounding phrases of welcome, only nodded towards the motor and his luggage and passed in. Already his first harsh impressions were modulating. Here at least was protection from the blazing sun; the long line of cypresses, cool and black, created a

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shade that seemed the one thing he desired; there was the delicious scent of fresh green things and somewhere in the distance he heard the sound of rushing, refreshing waters. Yes, this was very much better; and down the vista he caught sight of a jolly garden, a riot of color, a fountain in which water trickled over green moss, and the façade of a house that was all orange-colored stucco. Thank goodness he had got safely away from the dusty Piazza and the screaming urchins! But the silence! He could put out his hand and touch it. Not a soul in sight, only some birds hopping about, friendly, hospitable birds, evidently very much at home and ready to extend a welcome.

He walked along slowly, passed a little white house set back beyond the cypresses, and came at last into the garden and up to the front of the orange-colored house. He stopped before the door. It was not a much used door surely; the garlands of Banksia roses that fell half way across it testified to that. Indeed, it looked exactly as though it had not been opened during those one,

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two, three — Galbraith couldn't remember — centuries which had rolled by since it was constructed. It was a wonderful old door, warmed and mellowed by suns and dews, seamed with cracks and held together by bars of iron, and as redolent of adventure as the face of an old crusader.

Again the ugly knocker with the leering woman's face confronted him and again he frowned. The hideous thing interrupted an impression that was becoming very agreeable. Frowning as before, he let it fall and started at the tremendous clatter it made. Even the friendly birds flew away in a panic.

Then, once more, as he waited in the returning silence, he heard the sound of footsteps. This time they were old footsteps, he was sure of that, old and careful, clad in felt or velvet, muffled and surely moving down marble steps. Suddenly he caught himself smiling. It was all so exactly like a fairy tale,—the enchanted portal, the deserted garden, the forbidden entrance, the tread of unseen feet. Everything suggested enchantment, most of all the dragon with the woman's face and the spray

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of yellow roses striking against his brow. Then, to accentuate the fairy tale, the old face that finally peered out at him from the opened door, old as the door itself, wrinkled, weathered, old, old, old, yet somehow alert and sun-warmed and very, very mellow.

“Che cosa desidera, Signore?”

This was his greeting as he stood rather forbiddingly across the threshold with a dignity that made Galbraith forget the amusing livery of brown coat, shabby trousers and felt slippers.

“What do you wish, sir? Only the garden is open to visitors; the villa is closed. The Signora Principessa is dead.”

“Yes, I know,” Galbraith replied. “But I am not a visitor.”

Suddenly the old head bent forward. His keen eyes fastened upon Galbraith’s face with disconcerting intentness; an expression of wonder, of bewilderment, of such a piercing quality that Galbraith moved back a step. The old man followed, drawing nearer all the time, his eyes still filled with the strange glow.

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Galbraith took refuge in speech. "I had a letter in Rome from my lawyer, Signor Torrecella. He was out of town but he wrote me to come here, that you——"

The old man held up both hands as though to impose silence.

"Signore! Signore!" His voice broke with excitement. "Dio mio! Arcipicchio! Corpo di Bacco!" On and on went the rich, resonant exclamations, his voice trembling under the passionate strain. Then, quite suddenly, he leaned forward, grasped both of Galbraith's hands and covered them with kisses. "You are the Principe!—the Principino!—the grandson of the Principessa! Come from across the world, across the great water—from the America! Benvenuto, Principino!"

Galbraith finally got his hands free, a bit abashed by this florid welcome; but the old man reached for them again and clung to them.

"Ah, Signor Principino——"

"But I am not Signor Principino—I am not a prince at all—I am only Gordon Galbraith—from New York."

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The fire in the old eyes faded and went out.

"You are not the Principino — come from America!"

Galbraith laughed. "I am not a prince, but I do come from America—yes."

"You are not the grandson of the Signora Principessa?"

"Yes, I am that; I'll have to admit it."

Once more the fires were blazing. "Ah!" A sigh that was tremendous relief. "Then you are the little baby of Donna Maria—the *piccolina* Donna Maria—who left us, Dio mio, how many years ago!"

Galbraith nodded gravely. "Yes, my mother's name was Maria."

"Then you *are* the Principino! Who else could you be!" His hands, clasped in exaltation, were extended to heaven. "Grazie a Dio!" Dutiful thanks thus rendered, he stood to one side of the door, assumed an important pose and bowed ceremoniously. His gestures made the event historical. "Enter, Signor Principino."

Galbraith entered. Dank air smote him in the

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face, a chilly blast that robbed the servant's welcome of its warmth. The murmur of gurgling, rushing, unseen water accentuated the feel of damp and musty things. He climbed the steps, broad slabs of stone that wound round three times where never a ray of sun penetrated, and came out into a large hall, one side of which was a loggia. Through the columns another garden came into view, very different from the one below; that one had been gay, intimate, bright with flowers; this one, several terraces above, was more a grove of cypresses and ilex, rows and rows of them, formal, with a depth of green that was almost black. Down a vista, at the moment burning in a low shaft of the sun, was a cascade, intricate jets of water coming from dolphins' mouths, from vases held by sea nymphs, from immense cornucopias balanced in the arms of gods who lounged upon strange monsters; all vividly gay, afire from the sun, and framed by the silence of black shadowing trees. Again the penetrating silence; the mysterious, still presence of centuries long dead.

"By Jove, it's wonderful," exclaimed Galbraith,

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forgetting the long journey, the dust and the heat. "It's Olympian!"

He went down the three steps that led to the walk along which he viewed the cascade and stopped there, surprised into wonder. He had never imagined anything like this. He had seen gardens before, perhaps every bit as large, even larger, but they had not impressed him as this one did. There was a very certain, definite charm here; he could not put it into words; he was not sure that he understood what it was; indeed, standing there in the silence, he found himself a little bewildered, even troubled.

With his back to the house he was unconscious of the two pairs of eyes bent upon him. The old servant, reaching the top of the steps several minutes after him, had called to his colleague, a woman not quite so old as himself, yet old enough to be in perfect sympathy with the place. Standing side by side they gazed at the newcomer who had just arrived from some strange part of the great world.

"Who is he?" the woman whispered.

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"Madonna mia! Who is he! Listen to the woman. Look at him, Pasquarosa."

"But I do not see his face. How can I tell?"

"How can you tell! Corpo di Bacco! Isn't his back enough? Whoever had a back like that! Look at his shoulders, vecchietta mia. Look at his long neck and the way the hair grows upon his head. Are you too old to see? Whoever carried his head that way but a Prince of Valdragone!"

The woman passed her hands across her eyes as though her vision had suddenly failed her. "What are you telling me, Vittorio! It is not possible. Have I gone back over many years! Am I looking at Don Claudio? But it cannot be. He is dead. We put flowers on his grave every giorno dei morti."

"No, no, foolish Pasquarosa. Dan Claudio is surely dead. This is the little baby of Donna Maria. He has come back from across the world to live with us."

Pasquarosa shook her head. "The little baby

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of Donna Maria! How can that be? That is a man I see; he is not a little baby."

"Foolish one! He couldn't be a little baby always, could he? That was thirty years and more gone. He has grown into a man. Hai capito?"

The woman pushed aside Vittorio and went towards Galbraith. It was all well enough to listen to Vittorio, but he was old and given to talking out of his fancies. How was it possible for this signore to be the little bambino of Donna Maria! She must see with her own eyes before she could understand. She drew nearer and nearer the stranger; she coughed to attract his attention; he turned towards her; she saw his face. Holy Mother! It was true! She couldn't be sure by the back of his neck, nor his black hair, nor the way he carried his head, but one look into his eyes was enough. He *was* the bambino of Donna Maria!

Suddenly her whole body became rigid with fear. She stood perfectly still except for her fingers; they moved slowly, the two central ones closing

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and leaving the first and little fingers extended stiffly. This accomplished, the spasm of fear appeared to pass from her. She smiled broadly, grabbed Galbraith's hands as Vittorio had done and covered them with kisses; but if Galbraith had been observant and aware of the significance he would have seen that her first and little fingers were still held stiffly pointing.

"Get up," Vittorio commanded, when Pasquarosa's effusive welcome had carried her to her knees. "The Principino must be shown to his rooms. Dinner must be prepared for him. Run, run to the Piazza and buy food for him, raw ham and melons, fresh pasta, fettucini, a fat chicken to be roasted, some of the large purple figs from the Campagna, a fiascone of the golden wine and one of the red. And listen, Pasquarosa, tell everyone you meet in the Piazza that the Principe di Valdragone has come home from across the world!"

Pasquarosa retreated to the house in search of the largest basket she possessed and Vittorio conducted Galbraith with all the importance that

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the moment demanded into the house and to the rooms which had been occupied by the Principessa.

"And the bath?" asked Galbraith, looking about the rooms with an expression that was far from contented.

"The bath!" Vittorio repeated, a little bewildered.

"You don't mean to tell me my grandmother didn't have a bathroom!"

Vittorio's eyes grew troubled; then, suddenly, he smiled with great relief. "Ah, Principino, the Signora went every year to the baths at Salsomaggiore. But they are a day's journey and more."

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the portiere with the valises. Without a moment's hesitation Galbraith opened one of the bags, took out some fresh linen, a towel and soap, rolled them into a parcel and started towards the garden.

"What is it the Principino wishes now?" said Vittorio, who had watched his every motion.

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"I am going to bathe in the fountain, Vittorio; out there where I saw the cascade."

"But, Signor Principino, that is not done! The garden is open to visitors in the afternoon."

"Then you can stand guard and tell all of those who approach that the view of the cascade is forbidden for the moment."

Vittorio, still protesting, tried to follow him. But it was impossible. Galbraith's long legs had already carried him to the spot he was going to desecrate. In despair Vittorio accosted Pasquarosa, who, with basket on arm and shawl upon head, was on her way to the Piazza.

"We are lost, Pasquarosa," he moaned. "He is like all the rest of them—mad, mad as a volpino. Listen to me, Pasquarosa. Do you know what he has done! He has gone to the fountain, he has taken off all his clothes, he is as naked as the sacred bambino, and he is standing in the water up to here." He ended with his hand to his neck.

Once more Pasquarosa's first and little fingers stiffened, then she crossed herself, threw the shawl quite over her face and turned away with an om-

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inous nodding of the head. It was exactly what she had felt would be the case. Hadn't she lived two-score years with the Principessa! How could a child—or a grandchild—or any member of the family be otherwise!

Still bemoaning her fate and that of the family she served, she went out of the garden, passed through the gate and crossed the Piazza. But she was not quite ready yet either to make purchases for the Principino's dinner or to disseminate the startling news of his return. That would have to wait a few minutes. Instead she went straight to the Duomo, bought a candle, lighted it and placed it at the feet of the Virgin, her favorite Virgin, the one who wore the red robe embroidered with grapes and wheat. Then, kneeling, she said a prayer for the little bambino of Donna Maria who had come back home from across the world.

"Holiest of Mothers, Pasquarosa implores thee, even if he be mad—as anyone can see—to give him a kind heart, a much kinder heart than thou gavest the Signora Principessa. Not that Pasquarosa has the right to criticize what thou doest,

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Holy Mother, but thou knowest full well that the Signora Principessa had the heart of a dragon. Not once in her whole life did she give poor Pasquarosa enough maccheroni to calm her hunger; and the damp room she made her sleep in was the cause of the pains she has now in her legs. Still, Holy Mother, don't keep her too long in Purgatory, just long enough to know what it means to suffer. And please, Madonna Santissima, let not this new Principino who has come back to us cast the evil eye upon his poor servants. Amen."

After carefully inspecting the candle to see that it was burning steadily, Pasquerosa rose and went out to the Piazza; and whilst the Principino's dinner was bought, and carefully, mind you, for even in a moment of such importance Pasquerosa had no intention of being cheated, the glad tidings were passed on from mouth to mouth.

Meanwhile, Galbraith, in the fountain, was cooling himself in waters that flowed from distant Alban heights.

III

“**RAW** ham and melon!”

Galbraith looked at the platter Vittorio had just placed before. It was quite fancifully arranged; thin slices of ham rolled into cylindrical form and pieces of orange-colored melon between. A sort of Renaissance hors d'œuvres, he decided; then his glance traveled to the fiasco of golden wine wrapped in its original straw protection, to the silver goblet beside it with the recurring emblem of the dragon with the woman's face, to the old Capo di Monte plates, to the strip of yellowed filet which served as cloth, and on gradually to the wall of the terrace covered with garlands of pink geranium beyond which loomed a view that made him fairly catch his breath.

What a view! What history, what drama, what vivid beauty! Far off to the right the Sabine Mountains, naked, gray, faint yellow, violet, rose,

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swimming in mists, softened by a translucent veil, with a tiny spot of white glowing halfway up the heights—ancient Tibur, medieval Tivoli. To the north, Soracte of Horatian fame, abrupt, staccato, isolated. Then Monte Cimino and the descending line of hills which reached to the sea; and the sea itself—a thin cord of brazen surface. So much for the frame. The picture within this boundary, a vast plain; to the superficial eye flat, to the sophisticated a mass of rolling land, fields, meadows, waste spaces, all undulating to and from unseen streams, the undulations so broad and rhythmic that they became great sustained chords of music broken now and then by little notes, grace notes, aren't they?—made of isolated watch towers from which fires used to carry tidings from one end of the wide plain to its farthest extremity—tidings of war, of devastation, of onrushing disaster, of world victories. They were carrying signals at this very moment, sun signals, and in such a way that a connected chain appeared to be strung directly across the spaces. Now and then a fragment of an arch appeared, sometimes several

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of them connected, remnants of aqueducts, though seemingly without relation to anything—apart, irrelevant, dead. But details were not a part of the view; it was the feeling of vast space which it created that made its grandeur. It might easily have been an ocean, so blue was it, so green, so made up of ever-changing lights. And out of this sea, far off, mysterious, somehow ominous, yet sparkling and vibrant, rose a city which gave voice to the vast plains; not one voice alone, but thousands of voices, voices from every land, tongues primitive and civilized, incomprehensible to one another and yet understanding too, understanding of what at the heart of things is eternal. The wide plains seemed to ring with these voices, some of them savage yells—greedy, domineering, cruel; some calm, soothing, restful; some cold and severe; some mere inarticulate cries of ferocity and barbarism; yet all of them alike in one note—a wail of despair and failure and utter futility. And above these cries, lifting itself out of their midst, created as it were by them, rose a dome serenely still and aloof.

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Galbraith shaded his eyes with his hands and gradually shut out the view. It was like closing a portal against the world. The vision left him a little dizzy.

He turned and found Vittorio watching him.

"Raw ham and melon!" he repeated automatically. "My dear fellow, do you expect me to dine on such exotic food as this?"

Vittorio lowered his gleaming black eyes with a respectful bow. The Signora Principessa always began her dinner with melon and prosciuto. When there were no melons she had figs.

"And still lived beyond her allotted time!"

"Scusi, Principino?"

Galbraith frowned. "Vittorio, I beg of you not to call me Principino."

How then was the Signor Principino to be addressed? He was not Signor Conte, nor Signor Marchese. Ecco! Vittorio's aged shoulders rose and fell. The question was quite settled. Così—there remained only Signor Principino.

"No, not even that remains. In America we are all just plain misters. Your Italian equivalent is

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signore—or signorino, if you find me too young for the most substantial form; hence I am, to you, Vittorio, if you please, Signorino.”

Vittorio’s face showed complete lack of conviction. *Va bene*, but wasn’t the Signorino’s—this pronounced with frank disapproval—grandmother a Principessa?

And wasn’t the Signorino—again pronounced as though the word caused bitterness in the mouth—the sole heir to the property, the only living member of the family, the only one left to hand the name of Valdragone down as many years, well, as many as had already passed. It wasn’t for the Principino—spoken brazenly and with full conviction of right—to say. He *was* the Principino, and that was the end of it. *Per Bacco!*

“Then you refuse, Vittorio, absolutely, to accept me as an American?”

Vittorio’s eyes swept toward the magnificent view. Of course, if the Principino insisted upon being called by a strange unpronounceable foreign name, he, Vittorio, being only a servant, would have to obey his orders; but when one had the

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right to the titles of Valdragone, why, in the name of the Sainted Mother, didn't one use them? The titles had been in existence before that new country the Principino came from was ever heard of; had been in existence as long as those hills over there; there was not a family to be found as old as the Valdragone.

"Ah, now, Vittorio, you are making me out too old. You'd have me the scion of worn-out stock—and I won't be that. The Valdragone family is a comparatively new one. There are heaps of well-known people who outdate us by several centuries. You've forgotten all about Tarpeia, the lady who had the distinction of having a rock named after her, all because she fancied the gentlemen who lived on yon hills more than she did her own kin in that distant city. There was General Hannibal, too, who spent two long years just here back of us, looking down with envious eyes upon the city he could not capture. Then there was Cincinnatus, who ploughed in those very fields beneath us; and heaps and heaps of others—all of them preceding the Valdragone."

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Vittorio shook his head. "I never heard of them, Principino."

He removed what was left of the raw ham and melon and put in its place a platter of steaming spaghetti, covered with rich tomato sauce and Parmesan cheese. This was followed by a chicken with roasted potatoes, a salad, a sweet soufflé, and at last delicious coffee.

Galbraith resigned himself to Vittorio's insistence upon the use of Principino; he saw it was quite impossible to change a custom which had apparently come into existence before the world itself. Instead of further argument he lighted a cigarette and, rising, strolled across the terrace to the wall covered with pink geraniums.

He was in that mood which follows a refreshing bath in a fountain and a satisfactory repast—that happy mood which is the precursor of comfortable digestion. The sun had just dropped behind the long line of faraway hills. Lights were glowing, deeper and deeper, and more and more intense; he felt as though he were in the heart of a mammoth jewel. And in this mood of perfect digestion

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his glance, as it reached the garden below him, came to an abrupt stop and remained riveted there.

IV.

INTO the world of vibrating color had suddenly come a spot of white, a mere spot, an atom, outlined at that moment against the rich blackness of a cypress—a woman in a white gown. She was without a hat and she moved about slowly as though she were in her own garden, quite at home. Galbraith watched her closely. Yes, she was at home, there was no doubt of that. See the way she stopped before the flaming Judas tree and broke off some faded blossoms—just as a gardener would have done. She stood a few minutes beside the fountain, she even sat on the rim of the basin and threw something into the water—perhaps supper for the goldfish. She plucked a spray of yellow roses, the same that barred the portal of the villa, and slipped it into the ribbon at her waist. Then she walked—or did she float?—towards the wall which formed the barrier of the garden and which formed also, many feet below,

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the beginning of that stupendous view. She stopped there—lingered perhaps expresses it better, for there was something gentle in the quiet way she moved—and became, as the lights blazed about her, an integral part of the picture.

Galbraith smoked three cigarettes and she was still there; yes, thoroughly at home; probably a contadina from the village who, using the visitors' privilege, came to the garden at its most perfect hour. That at least showed good taste and appreciation. Undoubtedly a sympathetic contadina, and an undeniably graceful one. Her manner of plucking that spray of roses and the way she threw crumbs to the goldfish had shown her grace, especially in the long, slim line of her arms. And the way she moved! Exactly, that swimming motion of Meredith's heroines. On the whole, and with the reservation that must be accorded the distance from which she was seen—and perfect digestion—he had to admit there was a certain charm in her presence.

He turned to Vittorio. "Do visitors come into the garden in the evening?"

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"No, Principino. The gates are closed at six."

Galbraith indicated the lady. "There is someone here now."

Vittorio approached the wall and peered down into the garden. Galbraith noticed that his old eyes lighted up much as they had when he met him at the door and recognized him.

"That is not a visitor, Principino," he said, smiling.

"No?"

"That is the Principino's inquilina."

"My what?"

"Your tenant."

"Ah, so I let property, do I? Does the lady live in the house with me?"

"She rents the casino from the Principino—the little house across the driveway."

"The little white house surrounded with magnolias?"

"Si, Principino—that is the casino. It has always been let by the Principessa. It brings five hundred lire a month." Vittorio's face showed great respect for the amount mentioned.

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"Then she's an old inquilina — as you call her?"

"No, Signorino Principino, she only came a month ago; just after the Principessa died."

"Italian, I suppose?"

"No, a foreigner—an English lady; perhaps from the Principino's own new country."

"My own new country!" He smiled over the unimplied contempt. "No," with another glance at the white figure motionless against the blazing sky. "No, I venture to say she is not American. Even from this distance I somehow have the feeling that there is nothing new about her."

"She speaks English," Vittorio suggested.

"So do I speak Italian."

"But the Principino *is* Italian."

The lady turned and came directly towards the villa. Perhaps she was going to call, pay her respects to her landlord; a bit informal, without a hat, but how was one to know what customs were in this place that was older than the world! Probably modern conventions had never come into fashion here.

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However, just as she reached the door, she turned to the left and walked slowly on, her head bowed slightly so that Galbraith could see only a crown of warm brown hair. At the corner of the house she stopped, hesitated a moment, then vanished up an outside flight of steps which led to the upper garden.

“By Jove, she’s coming up into the ilex grove—to the cascade. I really must have a closer view of her. She does look rather fetching; besides, if she’s my tenant——”

He threw away his cigarette, ran lightly into the house—Vittorio was left with eyes raised to heaven and hands outstretched. *Madonna mia!* These mad Valdragone!—and to the room in which he had dressed. He had suddenly remembered that the windows of this room gave directly upon the garden steps.

As luck would have it—and say what you please, luck, chance, fate, give it any name under the sun, has a great deal to do with what happens to us; makes us in a way puppets—well, fate, let us say, placed Galbraith in the shadow of the room in

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such a position that he could look out, play spectator, and yet be quite unseen.

The lady came up the steps, she passed just beneath where he stood, he could almost touch her, he was sure he caught the fragrance of her presence, and was going on towards the shadows of the upper garden when—fate again!—she stopped, or to be more exact, was stopped, by a voice calling softly to her.

She looked up and Galbraith saw her face.

Of course you'll say she had everything in her favor—and she did. The stage couldn't have been better set; the crumbling lichen-covered steps on which she stood; the wall festooned with pink geranium, a delicate assembly of old grays and moss greens and fresh pinks, pastel in softness; the varnished gloom of the ilex grove just behind; the pure black of the silent cypresses; the glory of the flaming heavens—all this fairly vibrating in the sunset radiance. Yes, the setting was perfectly chosen; and in it, a part of it, she stood, in a white gown, a simple, fresh, fragrant, summer frock, a sprig of yellow roses in the ribbon at her

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waist, a scarf of old lace, a bit yellowed, thrown about her shoulders.

At first Galbraith saw only the top of her head as he had seen it from the terrace, with its crown of warm brown hair which was not arranged in any special style, but appeared to lie apart naturally towards the center. This was probably what gave her that suggestion of the Madonna expression, this with her low brow and wide-apart, gentle, dark eyes, an impression which Galbraith felt the moment she lifted her face. Her age?—who could say? Perhaps twenty-five; perhaps a little more. But what difference does age make if the woman has charm! And she had it, he decided, looking down at her, more of it than he had ever seen before in a woman, a special charm made up of many components—beauty, line, personality, and, most of all, a certain mellowness which did not come from age or experience, but rather from something very sympathetic and very sensitive.

She lifted her face, sought the voice that had called to her and, finding it, smiled. It was such a lovely smile, slow, caressing, and so very, very

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sweet. It changed her like magic into a young girl. Had he thought her twenty-five! He was entirely wrong. She was only a child.

"Signora!" Galbraith heard a low voice, unmistakably Pasquarosa's, coming from the window next his. "Signora mia, he has come—the Principino!"

The lady's smile faded. She lifted her eyebrows an amazing distance; her eyes widened in surprise, almost fright. She came a step nearer.

"When?"

"To-day—this evening."

"Where is he?"

"On the terrace. He dines there at this moment."

The lady—the designation is Galbraith's own; she was no longer the young girl—looked up, then down, the steps as though meditating flight. However, she reconsidered this; she even came nearer the window.

"Pasquarosa" — this eagerly — "what is he like?"

A dubious silence followed the question; then:

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"Pasquarosa will not speak yet — only — she thinks——"

"Yes?"

"The Principino is a little strano."

"Strange? How?"

Pasquarosa's voice lowered confidentially. "Signora, I myself have seen him but once—for a moment; but Vittorio tells me that he talks in a strange manner. Imagine it, Signora, only this evening at dinner he told Vittorio there were many families about here older than the Valdragone—a lady in Rome, a Generale Annibale, up Monte Cavo way, a certain Cincinatto down in the Campagna, people we have never heard of—never, never! Then, Signora," the voice grew lower and lower, it was almost a whisper now, "he had no sooner arrived than he rushed out into the garden and bathed in the fountain—naked, Signora, naked as when he came into the world—naked as the Sacred Bambino! Vittorio saw him."

A gleam of humor shot through the lady's eyes.

"But what does he look like, Pasquarosa—in the face?"

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"Dio mio, he is a Valdragone—one of them gone a little mad! I make the sign of the horns when he speaks to me. All the Valdragoni have the evil eye."

A shadow passed swiftly across the lady's face. "All—Pasquarosa?"

This was answered with an expressive "Giá! Well—at least the men. Do you want him to come to see you, Signora?"

The lady's finely arched brows again rose that surprising distance. "I? Surely not!"

"Pasquarosa thought——"

"No, no, Pasquarosa, I don't want to see, to know, anyone—most of all the Principe di Valdragone. Thank you, cara mia. A riverdici."

She left quickly, one might almost have called it running away, down the steps and across the driveway to the casino.

She needn't bother, mused Galbraith, turning from the window and lighting a cigarette. He had no intention of breaking in upon her solitude. She wasn't half so pretty as he had thought, anyway. She was too, too—he sought vainly for an

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adjective that would soothe his offended mood—too, yes, he had it at last, too theatrical looking, with her warm hair and smooth skin and big eyes and red mouth and ridiculously lifting eyebrows.

Of course it was only fortuitous that he should have looked down at the little white house among the magnolias before he closed his windows that night.

“Don’t you worry a moment!” he addressed the casino in a bored voice. “You will enjoy all the undisturbed solitude you wish, as far as I am concerned, provided”—and this sordid touch expresses perfectly the infected condition of the wound—“you pay your five hundred lire promptly the first of every month.”

V

THAT was an immensely clever idea of Montaigne père to have Montaigne fils drawn gently from the arms of slumber by the peaceful sounds of a flute. Music, creating as it does a borderland between things real and unreal—with a tendency towards the latter—projects one into a floating condition from which a landing may be managed without a jar—provided the music continues. Galbraith landed comfortably on the sad, world-weary, exquisite Valse Triste of Sibelius. He had always loved and hated that bit of Finnish music; it made him abominably sad, it made him gay in a feverish way, it excited him inexplicably towards the end when a supreme effort is made to break away from shadow and come out into warm, thrilling sunshine; yet, with those three sad chords at the end he usually felt satisfied—or at least resigned.

When he opened his eyes the first object they

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rested on was a crucifix, the tortured figure of a Christ in ivory, the cross old chased silver. It appeared huge in the darkened chamber and singularly significant against the background of faded yellow damask with which the walls were hung. He lay a few minutes in the half light, his eyes open, his mind recalling and assorting the experiences of the day before, his ears eagerly listening; and all the while the music continued—the Valse Triste repeated and extraordinarily well played, followed by some Brahms waltzes and the last movement of the Tchaikowsky Pathétique.

He threw back the covers, got out of bed and groped his way to the window. With the curtains drawn back the morning light flooded the room; the crucifix lost its sinister domination and sank back into unimportance; the faded damask shone warmly; the sad music came to an end; and the glory of the sunlight, a radiance that warmed the soul, stirred into activity all of his pleasantest thoughts.

Vittorio awaited him on the terrace. Would he like his coffee there or out in the pergola where

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the olive groves began? The olive grove, by all means, Galbraith answered, going in the direction indicated and finding a little temple of yellow, crumbling stucco from which he could look out upon hillsides thickly covered with silver-green olive trees—an ideal color for the morning, early morning in its fresh, cool, misty tones.

Vittorio followed with the coffee. Had the Principino slept well?

He had, but he had been awakened by the saddest music he had ever heard. Who was it played the piano?

The English lady in the casino played the piano-forte. Had the music disturbed the Principino?

No, it had not disturbed him; it was a bit depressing, though. Why did she choose such abominably sad themes? A morning like this everyone should be gay.

Vittorio considered this dubiously. His fine old head wagged. If the heart were gay it was all well enough; but what difference did it make how much the sun shone if the heart were heavy?

“You mean the English lady has a heavy heart?”

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"No, Principino, it was you who said the music was sad. Perhaps the Signora received a letter this morning—" He stopped abruptly and pulled a letter from his pocket. "This just came for the Principino."

Galbraith found it uninteresting enough—at least it was not the sort of letter that made one either sad or gay; it was a short note from the administrator of the estate stating he would have the honor to come that evening to pay his respects to the Principe di Valdragone and discuss some legal matters with regard to turning over the property to him.

Galbraith sipped his coffee and looked out over his possessions.

His possessions! He smiled and frowned, though there was nothing in them at that moment to cause anything other than smiles. Without the hot sunset colors the scene was less theatric, more pastoral, infinitely more intimate and quiet. From where he sat a road was visible winding along the hillside, in and out among olive groves. Few signs of life broke the peaceful silence — a wine-cart

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lumbering slowly along the road to Rome; some women in a vineyard singing lustily while they dug in the earth about the vines. That was all. He might have been thousands of miles away from the rush of modern life.

He loafed through the morning—physically and mentally. Energy seemed a thing of the past; all the rush, the excitement, the travel, the changing scenes of the past fortnight sank into distant memory, almost forgotten, hushed into oblivion. Was this Italy?

In the late afternoon he went down the circular staircase and out to the jolly little garden before the house. He passed the Judas tree where the lady in white had passed the evening before; he sniffed the yellow roses on the vine from which she had plucked a spray and slipped into the ribbon at her waist; he sat on the ledge about the fountain and watched the goldfish—the very same she had fetched supper to; then he went to the wall and leaned against it—exactly as she had done. While he stood there wondering if she were going to come out again and if she would speak to him, and what

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she would say if she did, and what he would reply, and how she would look when she was actually there before him, talking to him—you see, the wound of the night before was healing—he heard a carriage roll up the driveway and stop before the house.

He turned and saw a footman descending and lifting the dragon knocker; he saw the door open and Vittorio receive a card; then he saw him coming towards him.

“The Signora Marchesa Santacasa wishes to see the Principino.”

Galbraith took the card and glanced at it.

“I never heard of her. What does she want?”

Vittorio raised his expressive shoulders. How could he know? The Marchesa lived in the villa nearest the Principino. Perhaps she had come to pay her respects.”

“Do I have to see her?”

It would be polite and most gracious of the Principino.

Galbraith drew a long breath; he hated the idea of visitors at the moment when the lady in white—

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by this time the wound was completely healed—might come out of hiding and show herself in the garden; however, if the Marchesa of the Sainted House had been good enough to call, he supposed he would have to be gracious enough, as Vittorio put it, to receive her.

He found the carriage to be a very smart Victoria, and in it an old lady, smart too, in laces and silks and a much-befrilled parasol. She held out her hand to him and as he took it he knew in a flash that he was going to like her immensely; her bright, smiling, clever, wrinkled face was full of camaraderie.

“Are you the Principe di Valdragone?”

Her face-à-main went up and she took Galbraith in from head to foot.

He drew himself up with an unconcealed frown. How insistent that infernal title was!

“No,” he replied. “My name is Gordon Galbraith.”

The old lady gasped. “You don’t mean to say you are not going to use your title! I thought that was the first thing Americans went after.”

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"American women—yes."

Her head went up with a jerk. "Do you mean to be insulting?"

"Insulting! I don't think I understand."

"Did you read my card? I am an American woman who uses her title."

Galbraith could not keep back a smile. "But, of course, you had to. When you married an Italian, you were no longer an American. Your position became dependent upon that of your husband."

She met this disdainfully. "What gave you such an absurd idea? I am over sixty and I have never yet been dependent upon a living soul."

"I was speaking figuratively."

"No—not even figuratively, or any other way of speaking. Even though I married an Italian, I remained American. Do you understand?"

"An American Marchesa! But you were always that!"

She met this with a wrinkling of her whole face and settled back in the victoria.

"Now you are trying to pacify me with com-

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pliments—a woman of sixty. I suppose, though,” with a sigh, “I am more susceptible than ever. . . . Will you drive with me?”

“But—I was told you had come to call.”

“So I did; can’t I make it driving?”

Galbraith threw a furtive glance about the garden. Perhaps the lady in white was not coming out; perhaps it was too early for her; the sun was still high; it was a full hour before sunset.

He took his place beside the Marchesa. They drove down the avenue of cypresses and out to the Piazza; then, skirting the town, left it behind them.

“So you are not going to use the title?” She was back at the subject of vital interest at the first opportunity.

Galbraith was not sure that he would frown or laugh. The subject was so eternally recurrent.

“Wouldn’t it be rather absurd?”

“That depends upon the point of view. It is yours by right, isn’t it?”

“But I am an American citizen. I always shall be.”

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"You are half Italian?"

"Physically—yes; mentally—not a bit."

Again the face-à-main went up and a close inspection followed. "You look the part. I should never take you to be anything but an Italian."

Galbraith made a wry face.

"Aren't you pleased? They are a handsome race."

He bowed to the compliment. "I find Americans handsomer."

The old lady's eyes twinkled. "American women—yes; I'll admit that; but not the men. I detest clean-shaven faces. They are too, too—what shall I say?—colorless; perhaps a bit emaculated."

"Then you think a black mustache gives sex?"

"It's a fairly large component; not too florid, not too much curled, but"—the smartly-gloved hands went out in a comprehensive gesture—"sufficiently hirsute."

Galbraith found his first impression deepening. He liked her immensely; there was something quick and gay and very plucky about her. In spite of

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her threescore years, and possibly a few more unacknowledged, she was as young as himself. Perhaps a bit extravagant in her attire—he glanced at her black chiffons covered with a jolly design of roses, her sumptuous use of laces, her very gay parasol and her frankly made-up face. But why shouldn't one dress gaily if one felt gay!

Little by little she told him of her life there.

"I came as a tourist to Rome, I remained a winter, met a man, fell in love with him the first moment I laid my eyes on him, married him, and here I've been ever since. But, like all good things in life, he didn't last long—only ten years. I woke up at thirty to find myself saddled with his estates which had been redeemed, I'll confide to you, with my own money—and quite alone. Somehow, I've got along fairly well. Happy? Well, not exactly that—but contented. Like most normal beings, I need frivolous things now and then, so I go to Rome in the winter for them. I have a town palace, but I never open it—my legs were not made for Roman staircases. Instead, I take a suite at one of those horrible hostelrys

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which have sprung up in recent years—very comfortable, very warm, outrageously dear, I literally pay through the nose—but I am amused looking on at the modern products of all the nations under the sun. When I am fed up with that side of life I come back here and rusticate.”

“Now,” she ended, “I’ve told you everything there is to know about *me*. I’ve left out the skeleton because there really isn’t one—unfortunately for my romance. I only wanted you to know that I was a harmless, lonely old lady living by herself, delighted that she now has a neighbor from her own land, one to whom she can be confidential, and one who,” here she sought Galbraith’s eyes, “might be willing to make a confidant of her. Are we going to be friends?”

Galbraith pressed her outstretched hand. “I’m sure we are; but I’m afraid I have no skeleton either.”

She scoffed at this. “You, a Valdragone, without a skeleton! Of course you have; you just have not found it yet. There must be a collection.”

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"But, you see, being the American branch, I have lost that possession."

"And now you have come back to dig them up."

"Indeed, I have no such intention. I am going to let the past sleep."

The old lady's eyes were frankly doubting. "I wonder if that will be possible! I wonder if the past will let *you* sleep!"

Galbraith looked at her quickly. Evidently she knew something that he did not know. This was the second suggestion that had come to him. He recalled the words of the lady in white: "Above all, the Principe di Valdragone."

"Let's talk intimately," the Marchesa continued as she saw the troubled look flash across his face. "Impersonal conversations are so boring. Life is too short to waste time beating about the bush. I'm dying to know all about you. Are you married? I hope not."

She was continually making Galbraith laugh. Didn't she approve of the holy state of matrimony?

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Oh, yes, for some people; but if she liked a man, she was sure to hate his wife.

He put her mind at rest; he was not married.

Bachelor?

He nodded.

She had to be precise; there were all sorts of unmarried people these days who weren't bachelors. "All I know about you is that your mother was the daughter of the Princess of Valdragone; that she married an American and never came back to Italy; that she is dead and that you, at the death of your grandmother, being the last survivor of the family, have inherited the property—and the title. You see how wanting in detail my information is."

"It is quite complete—and correct. There is absolutely nothing more to know."

Again she scoffed. "Now you are becoming rather tiresome. You refuse to talk about yourself. You reject my proffered friendship."

Galbraith hastily denied that. She only needed a few details to complete his history which he would at once put at her disposal. His mother

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had married a Protestant, which was sufficient reason for his grandmother never to see her again. She had died a few years after her marriage—when he was born. At ten he was an orphan, living with a bachelor uncle, his father's brother. The only tie he had ever had with Italy was the maid his mother had brought with her, and who had remained as his nurse and from whom he had learned to speak Italian. But she had died when he was young, so that absolutely no influence had been left which in any way had bound him to Italy. After that? Well, his life had been that of the average American boy—school, college, and latterly his profession, if he must admit it, was that of a fairly successful lawyer.

“Then you arrive here without any prejudices whatever?”

“Not only without prejudices, but in absolute ignorance. I know nothing about my family, this part of it, and I haven't even seen the administrator who is in charge of the estate. He is coming to-night to dine with me and make me spend the night, I suppose, in signing papers.”

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The Marchesa received this in silence. It appeared a bit extravagant, yet Galbraith's face was convincingly frank.

"So you know nothing, absolutely nothing," she took up again, "about your grandmother's—what shall I call it?—career?"

"Nothing. Was it so extraordinary?"

The Marchesa lowered her parasol and signalled the driver to return to the villa.

"My dear young man, you have much to learn."

"And you are going to be kind enough to begin my instruction?"

The old lady hesitated. "No; on the whole, I think it wiser to leave that to your lawyer."

"But his information will be so dry, so legal. Yours would be illuminating."

"Illuminating—yes, I admit that myself; but it wouldn't really be good form—the first day I met you. Later—who knows!"

They were entering the gates of the villa now.

"You knew her well?" Galbraith asked.

"I? Heavens, no! Do you think she would

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speak to an American? Common, vulgar, abhorrently new, no traditions, no families, no crests, nothing but filthy money!"

"She sounds frightfully unsympathetic," Galbraith mildly commented.

"Unsympathetic!" The old lady tossed her head with real fire. "You express it gently. Do you see that iron knocker on your door? That dragon with the woman's face? That is what the peasants about here call the portrait of the Princess of Valdragone. Now I suppose I have offended you hopelessly."

Galbraith laughed, really amused. She was not the sort one could possibly be offended with. Yet beneath his laughter lurked an unpleasant sensation of something sinister.

He was just on the point of replying to the Marchesa when a flash of white in the garden made him stop short in the middle of a sentence. She saw his glance, followed it, and together they watched a white figure disappear in the shrubbery about the casino.

The old lady held up an accusing finger.

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"To think you have been lying to me throughout this afternoon! Shame on you!"

Galbraith was at a loss to understand; his face showed it.

"You said you had left out no details. Now, quite innocently, I find a woman in the case who went entirely unmentioned. Right here in the villa with you, too!"

"There is nothing easier to explain. She, I was told last night, is my inquilina. She rents the casino from me."

"Who is she?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"She appeared rather good-looking."

He considered this. "Yes—in a way."

"Then you have seen her?"

"From a distance."

"Italian?"

"English—they say."

"Who say?"

"My servants."

"Will you call?"

"No—I think not."

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"Isn't it an obligation?"

"Not when she said she wanted to see no one—least of all the Principe di Valdragone."

The Marchesa laughed, delighted. "She said that to you?"

"To my servant."

"But since you are not the Principe di Valdragone, only Mr. Galbraith, a simple American, wouldn't that make a difference?"

"It might, if I were sufficiently interested. Somehow, though, I have an unaccountable fear of professional pianists. They are too—too temperamental."

The old lady's eyes brightened. "She plays! How delightful! I am hungry for music. I shall call on her at once—especially if she is Anglo-Saxon. She ought to be an oasis in this desert. What is her name?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You are hopeless! Well, I shall find out, and in a few minutes. . . . Are you coming to see me?"

"Any day you set. I hope it will be soon."

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She gave him her hand—this time he kissed it—
and her friendly smile.

“Then Sunday. We’ll have tea on the terrace.
Au revoir.”

VI

THEY had finished dinner, Galbraith and Signor Torrecella, and were still sitting at the table. Vittorio had removed the cloth and left only the tall silver candlesticks and a glass platter of Venetian fruit which served as decoration. In the dim glow of the candles the room appeared enormous; its walls, frescoed in imitation of broad Corinthian columns through which painted landscapes showed, towered up to a domed ceiling. Through the open windows the outside world shone indistinctly in the warm colors of an Italian night in May—deep purple sky, deep red stars, deep black cypresses; and from its warmth came the strong, sweet scent of shrubbery and flowers and running waters.

Galbraith, through a haze of cigar smoke, looked long and intently at the face of the man sitting opposite him. It was a singularly picturesque face, big in feature, almost heavy in its modeling, warm in coloring; the forehead rather low and

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broad from which the hair, black with streaks of gray, grew back in broad waves, handsome, leonine; the nose, pure Roman; the mouth, covered by a large, black, florid mustache, sensual and generous; the heavy jaw and chin brutal; the eyes, prominent, round, black, luminous, and filled with a certain intellectual activity and great physical virility that made for personality. Somehow one felt that he was still very much what his ancestors had been; in the gleam of his fine eyes one caught flashes from a past that was long dead and yet still insistently alive.

With a word of apology, the Signor Avvocato rose from the table and fetched from a chair where he had put it a much worn leather portfolio. He laid it on the table and opened it. Galbraith wondered, as yellowed bits of paper with dangling seals were exposed under the soft glow of the candles, if he were going to be brought face to face with the skeleton the Marchesa was so sure existed. For a moment he almost dreaded this delving into the past. After all, it was a part of himself; at least the blood that was in his veins now

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was the same that had made that past. For the first time he realized that influence, tradition, call it what you will, was going to enter into his life.

The lawyer began reading the details of the will. The list of real estate seemed interminable—property in Rome, country places in Umbria, in Tuscany, a castle in the Pontine Marshes, uncultivated lands in the provinces of Apulia and Calabria. Galbraith was bewildered by the strange names and what they represented. Out of the mass he clung to two facts which seemed tangible—a palace in Rome which dated from the XVth Century and this villa in which he was already domiciled. A few personal bequests caught his attention, particularly of two thousand lire which was to be divided between Vittorio and Pasquarosa in appreciation of their faithful services. Otherwise the estate was left to him in its entirety.

The reading finished, the lawyer sat back in his chair and lighted one of the long, thin Tuscan cigars which he preferred to the more elaborate Habanas his host offered him.

Finally Galbraith broke the long silence. "You

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probably don't know what a stranger I am to all this." He swept his hand in a gesture which comprised the papers on the table and their surroundings. "My mother died at my birth; my father never mentioned Italy to me—you no doubt know why; consequently, when I received your letter informing me that I had inherited this property, it came like a bolt out of the blue. I am as ignorant of what this family of Valdragone represents as though I had never heard of them. Judging from a few things I have heard since I arrived, I fancy the family possesses some rather interesting characteristics, particularly"—he smiled whimsically—"my grandmother. Was she really such a—what shall I say—*belle dame sans merci*?"

The lawyer's glance shifted from Galbraith's; for a few moments he appeared to be weighing the question. "Già!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "She was an extraordinary woman—the Principessa." Then, quickly, as though changing the subject: "Do you know the history of Italy—it's history of the past fifty years?"

"Only superficially."

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“It was a terrible struggle. It is not over yet. Years still must pass before we are a really united country. The struggle has left scars that are not yet healed! it separated families which have not yet come together; it explains so much that the outsider does not understand, for beyond the struggle of bringing a nation together as one people was that deeper one of allegiance to a faith which had to suffer in order that unity might be achieved. . . . Your grandmother was a black—a Papist; it was in the blood; two popes had been members of her family. When you know this, you will not wonder that when Victor Emmanuel entered Rome and Pio Nono had to fly from his kingdom like an ordinary fugitive, she felt that she was a fugitive too, that the kingdom to which her allegiance was a matter of centuries had been invaded and subjected to the usurper. She closed her Roman palazzo, barred and sealed the doors, brought everything she valued most here and made a public vow that she would never return to Rome until the Pope had been restored to his power. Even when he returned to the Vatican and took

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up his residence there she maintained that he was only a prisoner; that if his feet were not permitted to touch the polluted pavements of Rome, neither would hers. . . . She lived here looking down upon Rome for forty years, her religion with its lost cause turning gradually from bitterness into hatred—a hatred that grew into passionate cruelty towards mankind.”

Galbraith sighed with relief. It was the story of a lost cause and an all-sweeping devotion to it. He found himself rather applauding.

“I begin to understand now my mother’s situation. She was born in this milieu?”

The lawyer nodded. “Yes, in the Palazzo in Rome. When you open the Palazzo you will see the room that was hers. It was never opened after she fled with your father—a Protestant whom the Principessa had forbidden in the Palazzo.”

“And my mother’s brother?”

Ah, Don Claudio! The Signor Avvocato had known him well. His marriage, too, was a més-alliance—from the Principessa’s point of view; a

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girl from the north whose father was a member of the court of the usurper who called himself king. He, too, had been denied the Palazzo, the Principessa never saw him after his marriage, and when he and his wife died suddenly of a fever that was devastating Rome, even then the Principessa would not relent and take their orphaned child to her heart. He himself, the Signor Avvocato, had been ordered to carry the child to the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Florence and put her in the care of the sisters there. This child would, on coming of age, have inherited the property which was now his, for his mother had been given her share when she had gone to America.

Galbraith's glance returned to the papers. "Did this orphan, the daughter of Don Claudio, die young?"

The lawyer searched among the papers and found a thin envelope. Looking at it, his whole face softened. It was exactly as though the question had suddenly brought to life a very tender memory; a memory, though, without joy, for his expression was that of very deep sadness.

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He held up the envelope. "This is the record of her death—in Switzerland—eight years ago."

"Ah, then she died out of Italy?"

"Yes—she had left Italy—she had disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

The lawyer drew out a large handkerchief and wiped his brow. He faltered over further explanation. He used the word disappeared because the Principessa had always expressed it that way; the world was told that; at least until her death was announced.

"You are not making a very clear story of it," Galbraith commented, his eyes intent upon the older man. "Why was it necessary to say she disappeared?"

"Principe, I beg you will not ask it of me. My last words to the Principessa were that I would not tell it to the world. You, most of all, she did not wish to know it."

"Why?"

"She felt, I think, that you might wish to know the details, to trace the matter, to discover per-

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haps——.” He broke off abruptly and, rising, crossed to the window and stood with his back to the room.

Galbraith lighted a cigarette and drew at it deeply. Here at last was the skeleton. Suddenly he determined to speak more frankly to this lawyer than he had yet intended.

“I hope, Signor Torrecella, that it is my right to know everything about this family. Before I return to America——”

The lawyer turned quickly. “Return to America?”

“Before I return I wish to have everything settled. If there has been wrong done to a member of this family, and I judge, from what you say, that this daughter of Don Claudio was badly treated, I wish to do everything in my power to make reparation, if such a thing is possible.”

The lawyer was back at the table, leaning his hands upon it and staring intently at Galbraith.

“Do I understand, Principe, that you will not remain here?”

Galbraith smiled. “No, I have no intention of

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remaining here; furthermore, I am not sure that I shall accept this inheritance."

Signor Torrecella's fine eyes showed consternation. "But, Principe, if you refuse the inheritance, there will never be a chance to right the wrong. All the property would go to the church."

"Then you admit that a wrong has been done! Yet you hesitate to tell me."

"Should not one respect an oath made to the dead?"

"Not if, by observing it, the living are injured."

Suddenly the lawyer's whole expression changed; his prominent eyes grew wider and more searching. "The living!" he exclaimed.

Galbraith rose, impatient and somewhat annoyed. "Signor Torrecella, we seem to be talking at cross purposes. If you know anything about my family that I should know, that would help me in my decision about this property, I beg that you will tell me at once."

Torrecella sank down in a chair and covered his face with his hands. He was torn between the

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temptation of what he thought was right, more than that, what would clear the situation forever, and what he had promised to do. In the end the promise conquered. He lifted his face and met Galbraith's watchful eyes.

"Principe, I gave my oath. Do not ask me to break it."

Galbraith's expression hardened. "Then the property goes to the church. I shall accept nothing unless I know the truth. Even then I may not accept it—if there is anything dishonorable attached to it."

Torrecella's dilemma increased. Surely duty and promises made for vastly conflicting emotions. Either one or the other led to disaster. Fate was lifting the responsibility and forcing him to risk at least half the truth.

"You are making me perjure my soul," he broke out with hot resentment.

"I am only insisting upon what I feel is my right."

"You are determined——"

"Quite."

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Torrecella drew a long breath, then spoke hurriedly, as though he wished what he was saying to be spoken and back of him forever.

“Francesca, Don Claudio’s daughter, ran away from the convent in which the Principessa had placed her. She was only sixteen at the time and miserably unhappy. She came straight here to the Principessa and implored her to let her remain here. But, you see, the Principessa hated her. Her father had married a woman who was of the enemies of the Vatican. The child of such a marriage could be nothing less than an enemy too. The Principessa would not have her in the house. She could not look calmly upon her. She sent her away—out of Italy—to Switzerland, where she died a year later.”

Torrecella looked at Galbraith and found him smiling oddly at him.

“Signor Avvocato, you are telling me half the truth.”

“Signor Principe, half or whole, it is the truth—and it is all that I can tell you.”

A candle tilted and spluttered in its socket.

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Galbraith rose and straightened it. Then he crossed to the window and stood there a long time. The skeleton was not yet out of the closet, but at least he knew in which closet it was kept. Why did this old, faithful friend of the family wish to hide the story from him? Was it so sordid that it would make him ashamed of the blood that was in his veins? He stared out into the sweet-scented night. The sound of singing, far-off, a warm tenor voice, floated across the still night to him—a gay, lilting song with an ever-recurrent minor strain. The fountain in the garden gurgled weirdly. Across the dim Campagna, broad as the world, some lights flickered—Rome.

“If this Francesca Valdragone is dead——. You spoke of righting a wrong——. Isn’t it too late to do anything?”

The lawyer still sat at the table, his arms stretched out before him. Without turning, he spoke: “Principe, do you believe the dead know what we do?”

Galbraith threw away his cigarette. He watched it fall and disappear in the garden below. For a

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moment he saw it glow in the darkness, then go out.

"I don't know that I have ever thought of that."

"They do, Principe. I am as sure of it as I am that we are here to-night talking to each other. Little Francesca is listening to us. She hears us. Whatever we do she will know it. Why is it not possible to do something that would please her, something that perhaps she would have done if she had lived?"

Galbraith came back and sat down beside the man who had just advanced what at first struck him as extravagant sentiment. But the sentiment impressed him, touched him. He looked at the fine Roman face with a new interest. This was a side he would never have suspected.

"What would she have done, Signor Torrecella?"

"Founded a home, I think, for girls who, as she, had been left without parents and forced to face the world alone and unprotected. Why not do this rather than renounce the right to the property—rather than leave it to those who have never

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heard of Francesca. Believe me, Principe, she would know. And think what it would mean to her. She would know then that she had not suffered in vain; that through her joy and happiness and protection had come to others. Don't think me a dreamer or a man enmeshed in fanciful ideas. I speak to you from the heart. We Italians are a sentimental race; deep down in us is an old love of the beautiful, the beautiful in the material and in the spiritual world. If you had known the child Francesca you would understand."

He got up slowly and held out his hand to Galbraith and, as their eyes met, he smiled in a way that changed his whole personality.

"You come from a practical race, Principe, at least on your father's side; from your mother you have something else. I think I have found it to-night. If I have touched it I shall be satisfied."

Galbraith answered his smile. "I think you have touched it—yes. But you must give me a little time. You see, a month ago, all this did not exist for me."

VII

IT was only a step from the villa, across the gravel walk, to the casino gate, but Torrecella made it with effort. He was breathing hard; he could even hear the sound himself; it was distinct and loud on the great stillness of the night. At the gate he pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his brow. What a frightfully still, oppressive night! Scirocco was in the air and it took a Roman to know what scirocco meant. It sapped all the energy out of one in an hour. An Englishman had said that it made one feel like a restless rag. That expressed it exactly. *Per Bacco!*—and it came all the way from the Lybian desert.

She was awaiting him in a dimly lit room, her face, her eyes, her extended hands full of questions. Torrecella sank into a chair, still mopping his brow, still breathing hard—how old and excitable he was growing!—and accepted with murmured thanks the glass of Marsala she proffered him.

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"You have seen him?"

He nodded.

She waited without trying to dissemble her impatience. "Ebbene, Torrecella—what is he like?"

Torrecella's hands went up in protest.

"What is he like! A woman's question! Always, what is he like! Haven't you seen him?"

She admitted that she had seen him from a distance—walking about the garden. She was not sure, but she fancied he was a real Valdragone; his long, lean figure; his smallish black head; somehow he had made her think of her father. Was he not like him?

"You say all this and then ask me what he is like! You have seen him as well as I."

She smiled leniently at Torrecella's accusation.

"At least I haven't dined with him — as you have."

"How do I know you haven't! How do I know what you have done!"

"No-no. I am keeping nothing from *you*."

His shoulders went up full of doubts.

"I watched for him the evening he was to arrive."

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He walked up the avenue, quite alone, and passed near where I could see him. I fancied I saw an expression of surprised pleasure on his face. I'm sure the place appealed to him. Then, after dinner, I saw him again, but only for a moment. I was going up the steps into the ilex grove when he suddenly appeared at the window, saw me, and hid — at least he thought he was hidden — and listened to what I said."

"What you said! To whom?"

"To Pasquarosa. She had called to me from the kitchen window."

"What did you say?"

Whimsical lights glowed in her eyes. "You are going to be shocked."

Torrecella sniffed. "I'm sure of that."

She frowned and turned away. "Then I shan't tell you."

"You must. It is your duty to tell me everything. I must know each step you make. Otherwise" — he threw out his hands — "I'll wash my hands of the whole questionable affair at once."

"Questionable!"

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"Si—si. For it is nothing else. What did you say?"

"I merely asked Pasquarosa if he had come. Then"—after a slight pause—"I asked her what he was like."

"Of course—woman's eternal question! Go on."

"Then, after Pasquarosa had given a most uncomplimentary description of him—and told me he had bathed in the fountain—she asked me if I wished him to come to see me."

"And you replied yes."

"Not at all. I replied that he was the last person in the world I wanted to come to see me."

Torreccella was on his feet. "You said that! But why—why!"

"A man who hides behind a window and listens to a conversation is an—an eavesdropper."

"Nonsense! You did the same thing. You just confessed it."

"I only looked. I did not listen."

"There is no difference. Besides, any man would look and listen to a pretty woman. I'd do it myself. Are you sure he heard you?"

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"Quite."

Torrecella sank down with a deep sigh. Perhaps, after all, it was better that he had heard her. It would at least be an inhibition to their meeting; and somehow their meeting seemed to him fraught with dangers. He could not be at all sure of what she would say or do. Yes, the longer they were kept apart the more quickly and satisfactorily the whole matter would be despatched and got rid of. He could be sure of the man; but the woman, no, none of them!

He pulled a long, thin Toscana from his pocket and fumbled with a match. In the end she lighted it for him. When he had drawn at it and blew a long cloud of smoke straight out before him, she smiled at him in her wistful, appealing, irresistible way.

"And now—your impressions."

His impressions were not at all personal. He appeared a pleasant enough man; perhaps a bit better than he had expected. On the whole, for an American, he supposed he was rather unusual; this, of course, because of the fact that he was half

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Italian. He spoke Italian perfectly. He hadn't appeared much interested in the property; but he had asked numerous questions about the family, about his grandmother — and particularly about Francesca Valdragone.

She started. "Why Francesca Valdragone?"

"Because, well, because I told him that if she had lived she would have been the rightful heir."

"Yes, yes, go on. Why do you hesitate?"

"Signorina mia, I am not hesitating! If you interrupt, politeness demands that I stop. Ecco! He wanted to know what had happened to Francesca Valdragone. He demanded that I tell him. He said it was his right to know. He must know everything before he accepted the inheritance."

"And you told him——"

"That she had run away from a convent and gone to Switzerland and died there."

"Ah!"

A hot gust of wind rushed into the room, bringing with it a heavy scent of roses and orange blossoms. The night—at least so thought Torrecella—was growing more and more oppressive.

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"He appeared impressed with what I told him of Francesca Valdragone; so impressed that I thought it the moment to speak to him of your plan. I asked him if he would be interested in doing something in memory of Francesca Valdragone; something that I felt sure she would have done if she had lived. Wait. Listen to me. I have not finished. You do not know yet what I am leading up to. He asked what I meant. I told him that I felt sure she would have founded a school for children — children like herself — who were left in their childhood without parents. Was not that an inspiration? It is the first step towards getting the villa for you—and at a bargain. Do you understand?"

She looked at him out of a long, depressing, pitying silence.

"Poor Torrecella! The scirocco has reached your brain. What should appeal to him in such an idea—a stranger here—an American!"

"But he listened, I tell you."

"Of course——"

"And he is simpatico."

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“Ah, Torrecella, you are a dear—you are full of good intentions—but you are a Roman. I see—I shall have to work alone.”

Torrecella groaned. “Santa Paziienza!” Then he added with a touch of justified pleasure at the consternation it might bring, “You will have to work rapidly. He will return to America almost immediately.”

VIII

AT breakfast Vittorio presented a note to Galbraith. The envelope was sealed with lavender wax and beneath a gold crown ran the legend: "Se non vuol fare del male non fare del bene," which counseled one to do no good if one wished to do no evil. It was from the Marchesa Santacasa.

"I bearded the lion in the den; a very charming lion she is too—real charm. I use the word with precision. Incidentally she is not a professional pianist; also incidentally she is coming to tea with me this afternoon—quite informally. I assured her no one else would be here. Of course I was not sure at the moment I made this statement that you would come; but if you come in your humble capacity of plain American, without titles or background, she need never know the difference."

Galbraith slipped the note in his pocket and

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looked down at the casino. There was no sign of life there; it was basking undisturbed in the sunlight. If she didn't wish to meet him why should he force himself on her! Particularly if she were one of the sort who had heard and believed the story of the evil eye! But the Marchesa's invitation! He ought to accept that. It would be ungracious and unneighborly not to. Yes, he would go. The lady would not have to talk to him. What a primitive notion! The evil eye! And this the XXth Century!

He turned to Vittorio and fired a question.

"Vittorio, do you believe in such a thing as the jettatura—the evil eye?"

Vittorio hastily made the sign of the cross. The Principino surely knew that everyone in Italy believed in it.

"Which means then that you do. I had hoped, Vittorio, that you were more advanced. I am disappointed in you — bitterly disappointed. You believe then that I, a Valdragone, may at will cast an evil influence over you?"

Vittorio smiled confidently.

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"No, Principino, you can do poor old Vittorio no harm. He is protected by his great grandfather."

"Lucky man! Does he protect you from spells?"

Vittorio drew himself up proudly; his eyes glowed with an intense light; his manner became solemn and confidential; his hands were already forming elaborate gestures.

His great grandfather was a wonderful man. If the Principino were to go anywhere in the country about Castel del Piano he would hear of him—even though he had been dead for more than fifty years. Through his cool-headed courage he had saved not only his and his children's children, but again their children down to the seventh generation. More than that, he had liberated the whole town. From what? From the evil eye—the *jet-tatura*! It happened this way.

"Senta, Principino! My great grandfather was a woodcutter. Every morning he went into the forest to cut fagots. At nightfall he returned to his family in the town. One day, as he entered

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the forest, he heard a strange sound—a sound that was the malicious voices of women, that and unholy laughter. The sound seemed to come from a tree near him. He looked up and saw something that made his blood run cold. There on the bough just above his head sat three snow-white goats. Suddenly the sound of the voices ceased and the creatures looked down at him out of their wicked yellow eyes. My great grandfather lost no time. He knew what this strange sight meant. The creatures were not really goats—they were witches! His good mother, poverella, had taught him what to do. He took his long hunting knife with which he trimmed the fagots and drove it into the trunk of the tree. *Corpo di Bacco!* What a noise went up from the three white goats! *Santa Croce*, how they did scream! But my great grandfather paid no attention; he knew that they could not now move from the tree. He went into the forest and finished his day's work. At dusk he had to pass the tree again. The three goats had disappeared but in their place, *Principino*, were three women, women from *Castel del Piano*, women

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everyone knew. When they saw my great grandfather they began screaming again—talking and begging and imploring him to remove the knife and let them come down. They knew as well as he that if he did not remove the knife they would have to remain in the tree until they died. Dio Santissimo! But they were ugly, with their hair hanging down, their wild eyes and their hoarse voices coaxing and whining and threatening!

“My great grandfather stood with his hands making the horns, but he was frightened. Finally the ugliest of the three leaned over and said: ‘Amilcare’—that was my great grandfather’s name—‘Amilcare, if you will let us come down we promise to go away from here and never come back; more than that, we will liberate the town from the fatture we have cast on the people. Marriuccia, who is fading away—no one knows why—shall be restored to health! Fabiano’s dumb child shall speak! The wife of the Sindaco shall regain her sight! All shall be right in the town! More than this, Amilcare, for you we promise, we promise on the heads of the Saints, that you and

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yours shall be liberated from the evil eye and from all spells for seven generations. Seven generations, Amilcare!"

Vittorio mopped his brow with his hand. The moment for him was the tense one of his life.

"You will understand, Principino, that my great grandfather could not lose such an opportunity. It would make his old age peaceful and it would protect those dear to him even to the seventh generation. It would also make the town a safe place to live in. So—he went to the tree and drew out the knife. The three women came down with the swiftness of lightning and vanished into the shadows of the forest forever. And it was as they had promised, Principino. Their evil influence had been removed as they had promised. By the next day the whole town knew about it. Mariuccia and Fabiano and the Sindaco's wife all came to see my great grandfather and thank him for what he had done. There were great rejoicings. My great grandfather is still looked upon with reverence and respect, Principino; they even make a festa each year in his name."

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Vittorio could easily have told his story in pantomime; in fact, he did. He went into the forest, he discovered the witches sitting on the bough of the tree, he parleyed with them and at the end he watched them disappearing never to return;—all done with the drama that had come down to him across three generations.

“So you are quite assured, Vittorio, that I can do you no harm?”

The Principino need not worry about that; of course with Pasquarosa—it was another matter.

“She is afraid of my evil eye?”

Vittorio spread out his hands helplessly. He had tried to convince her that the Principino’s sojourn in another world across the water had removed the stigma; then, in the presence of a *jettatore* she could always make the sign of the horns. Vittorio ended by extending his hand and showing the first and little fingers extended while the two middle ones remained closed.

“Bring her to me now,” Galbraith commanded. “I wish to speak to you both—together.”

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When she had come into the room and stood before him—really facing him for the first time since he had arrived—Galbraith found her rather handsome, with a strangely Oriental severity of features—high cheek-bones, aquiline nose, straight coarse hair which was still black, dark, almost red skin, and a strikingly upright figure. She was scrupulously neat, her orange and purple kerchief carefully arranged, her very full skirt spreading voluminously, her long crescent-shaped gold earrings dangling with importance. There was no doubt of her possessing a great deal of presence. Galbraith felt sure she demanded consideration and got it.

For a few moments they faced each other in silence. When Galbraith's glance fell to her hands he found the fingers as he had expected. She was making the sign of the horns. For the moment he let it go unnoticed.

"My grandmother, the Princess of Valdragone——"

He stopped as Vittorio and Pasquarosa crossed themselves and murmured, "Dio la benedica!"

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"My grandmother, it appears, valued your services highly——"

Again he was interrupted, this time by a loud moan from Pasquarosa.

"Santa Rosaria! I knew it—I knew it all the time! He is going to send us away!"

"Have I said anything to suggest that?"

Pasquarosa was already launched upon a sea of expectant misfortune. Where were they to go? Never, since forty years gone, when she had come down from the mountains of the Abruzzi, had she set foot out of this paese! Where could they go? Bambino Gesu—have pity! All this came volubly from out the folds of the kerchief in which she hid her face.

"When you have finished," Galbraith said, "I will continue."

Vittorio remained silent during the outburst, calm and dignified and evidently ashamed of his wife's lack of pride. In the silence that followed he begged Galbraith to take no notice of her; they would give him no trouble if he wished to send them away; they would find something to do.



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Galbraith suppressed a desire to rise and grasp him by the hand.

"If you will control your wife I will continue."

Vittorio jerked the kerchief from Pasquarosa's face and emitted one word, "Basta!" but in such a way that her calm was at once complete.

"As I was trying to say," Galbraith continued, "my grandmother, appreciating your faithful services, has left each of you one thousand lire."

"Mille lire!"

The exclamation came from both simultaneously in awed, hushed voices. They stood before him as though stunned, their hands clasped in what might have been religious fervor, though their black eyes—wide open and fixed—danced with unutterable things.

They stood thus, exactly like little children, while Galbraith took some papers from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"Both of you must sign your names on these slips of paper so that the Signor Avvocato will know that you have received the money."

At this they unclasped their hands and stared

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at each other. Pasquarosa finally bowed her head.

"Signor Principino," she said, her voice very low, "we have never learned to write like signori."

Galbraith avoided their eyes, realizing their embarrassment.

"Then I shall sign your names for you and you can make a cross beside each. It will be just the same and I hope quite legal."

This accomplished with all the solemnity due such an important occasion, Galbraith took two one thousand lire notes from his purse and handed one to each. Again the transfixed look glowed in their eyes. Madonna Santissima! A thousand lire—two thousand lire between them!

Suddenly Pasquarosa placed it back in Galbraith's hand.

"Will the Principino be so good as to keep it for Pasquarosa?"

"You mean you don't want it?"

Her eyes danced merrily. "Si, si, I want it, but I could never close my eyes with a thousand lire hid upon me."

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Galbraith turned to Vittorio; he, too, appeared to be regarding the note skeptically. It was much more than he had use for at the moment. Would the Principino give him two hundred lire instead and hold the rest for him? He could use the two hundred because that was the price Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati asked for the donkey. Tears showed in the fine old eyes. It was very good of the Signora Principessa to think of them in that way. He and Pasquarosa had always wanted a donkey and a cart to drive in over the mountain to see their children on Sundays. They would go that evening, if the Principino would permit them, and light a candle for the Principessa.

“Now, about my dismissing you. I have no idea of doing that. Let your minds be at peace on that subject.”

At this Pasquarosa's smile became so all-embracing that Galbraith found himself smiling in return. For the first time he felt that Easter rose was not such an ill-chosen name for her. He suddenly decided the moment was propitious to speak to her.

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"There is only one thing that is causing me some unhappiness—indeed, very grave unhappiness. I wish you both well—all the happiness that should come to you. Do you understand? And it causes me real pain to have you think that I possess any power or inclination to bring evil upon you."

Pasquarosa's charming smile faded. She glanced about hurriedly as if contemplating sudden flight.

Galbraith assumed a sad tone. "I see — you don't trust me."

Pasquarosa, caught, sought refuge in protestations. The Principino was mistaken. She believed every word he told her. Of course he wished her no harm.

Galbraith rose and faced her.

"Then, if you believe that I am not a jettatore, you will straighten out the two middle fingers of your right hand."

She turned, looked at Vittorio for succor, found none, then again forced herself to meet Galbraith's eyes. It was the most awful experience the Sacred Mother had ever forced upon one of her children.

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Her knees trembled and gave way, she was at the end of all resistance, when suddenly a change came over her. Galbraith saw her eyes fasten on a coral horn which he wore attached to his watch chain. She drew nearer, completely fascinated by it. She held out her hand for it. Galbraith, amazed at the whole proceeding, detached it from the chain and handed it to her. She looked at it intently, turned it over and over in her palm, then looked at Galbraith with her eyes full of questions.

"It was my mother's," he said quietly.

Pasquarosa trembled from head to foot and fell on her knees before him. Tears of relief poured forth.

"I gave it to the Principino's mother! Dio mio—how many years ago! Pasquarosa has even forgotten herself! I gave it to little Donna Maria when she was so high—to protect her from all the evils—to guard her against the jettatura! Of course the Principino cannot have the evil eye if he wears that!"

IX

“**H**ER Excellency will receive you in the garden.”

A footman in elaborate livery and powdered wig conducted Galbraith through a series of splendid rooms out to a terrace and from there along a perfectly kept walk to a garden, equally well-kept, made of intricately formed rows and rows of box. It was distinctly different from his own garden; and as he walked along, following the important footman, he compared the well-groomed effect of this place with his own. Here was tremendous care and thought, perfection of detail, constant labor; the gravel of the walks was swept, not a stone appeared out of place; the box was clipped, not a yellowed leaf showed; even the fountain, a cherub struggling to hold a dolphin upright, gave the appearance of having been cleaned and polished; the water was so clear it might have been filtered.

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Without knowing exactly why, Galbraith felt himself resenting such perfection; it was out of place; things were not left enough to themselves; an extraneous influence was too potently felt. His thoughts reverted to his own garden, left to itself, resplendent in its decaying glory;—hoary old cypresses, moss-covered steps, gnarled ilex, leaf-strewn walks. It was much more sympathetic; it was age choosing its own adornment; this was age trying to be frivolous and young.

The Marchesa rose, a veritable mass of chiffons and laces and rippling draperies, and extended her hand. Her carefully penciled eyebrows rose sufficiently to show cordiality modulated by surprise.

“You!” she exclaimed. “How delightful of you to come to see me! How did you ever find the way?” After this well-delivered piece of comedy she turned to her other guest. “Mrs. Francis, may I present a friend from America? We were just discussing our beloved United States.”

Galbraith experienced a moment of—he didn’t know exactly what to call it—embarrassment, self-consciousness, almost consternation. He real-

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ized as he stood there before her, actually being presented to her, that she had filled his thoughts more than he had been aware of. She had been a sort of obsession, vague perhaps, unreal, viewed only from a distance, but very, very absorbing. Now she was real enough, there before him, sitting in a willow chair, gay chintz cushions a background to her white frock, a yellow rose—from his garden!—at her waist, her face shaded by a broad-brimmed, floppy hat of black tulle, her deep coloring, her red lips, her deliciously soft brown hair—all radiance. Good heavens—but she was beautiful! And he had been foolish enough to think it was due to the setting. Why, she was her own setting. She made the setting. She was the sort of woman you could put into the shabbiest of surroundings and in a moment they would change to splendor—an ambiente created by her own personality.

Alas — for enthusiasms! In a second they passed.

Her acknowledgment of the introduction was like a slap in the face; at least so thought Gal-

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braith. It was so coldly impersonal. Her eyes met his frankly enough, a well-bred smile flitted through them, her head inclined a fraction of an inch, her lips remained silent and closed;—that was all.

Galbraith bowed and turned back to the Marchesa.

“Do you disapprove of my garden?” she asked, pouring him a cup of tea. “Some so-called artistic friends were good enough to tell me I had ruined it. I suppose I am sufficiently American to want my surroundings swept and garnished. How do you like your tea? Please don’t say as it comes unless you like it strong. You do—good! No, I can’t abide shabby antiquity. Those muffins are very good. Those same artistic friends asked me, quite ingenuously too, if I didn’t think a great many people came to tea with me because I gave them such good food. I suppose the end justifies the means. One must have people—by fair means or foul. Latin teas are the verge of starvation. Did you feel the scirocco last night?”

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On and on she went, while Galbraith drank his tea, laughed perfunctorily and managed now and then to gather details pertaining to the lady.

What lovely hands she had! Thin, long, delicately made, almost too fragile, yet tremendously full of character. He was sure she could do almost anything with them, not merely tasks tradition had assigned to women, but bigger things. He wondered if she sewed. He didn't think so. There was something a little too remote about her for him to place her at any specific occupation.

"Yes," continued the Marchesa, "you can imagine the condition I found the place in. No one had lived in it for ages—centuries I should say. That appears to be the only time they calculate in over here."

She handed Galbraith a second cup of tea and passed him a plate of sandwiches. The powdered footman had been sent away.

"I'm always impatient to know what newcomers think of the Campagna. The French say it is triste; the English call it gay—but of course they would with nothing but fog and rain and smoke

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to rest their eyes on. Americans view it differently, according to their temperament."

No, thought Galbraith, apparently listening to the incessant chatter and not hearing a word—her hands were not made for real work, unless one were broad enough to admit that embroidery—the weaving of beautiful tapestries, the blending of colors into harmonious pictures—were a useful occupation. Surely that was what her hands were made for—beautiful things.

"My father came over here once to make me a visit. Being the typical American, he saw the Campagna only as a lost opportunity. He was in for buying it—en gros—and developing it at once, putting it on a paying basis, as he expressed it. The land should be farmed intensively; it could be made to produce four separate crops a year. The aqueducts should be pieced together; not a tremendous undertaking; a bit of iron pipe here and there and the trick would be done. The water power would run a hundred factories. Then, instead of being a lot of wasted land, let run wild to poppies and sheep and ruins, the whole Cam-

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pagna would be a land of plenty—of the full dinner pail. It was only because he was suddenly called home on business that he didn't actually put his plan into practice."

Her figure didn't suggest work either; not that it wasn't lithe—it was surely that—but just now, in repose, it possessed a certain languid grace—almost languor. The folds of her dress fell about her in long lines and revealed a figure that was alluring in its association of strength and softness; her feet, in white slippers—she was all in white except the black, floppy hat—were rather long, very slender, perfectly arched. Her arms! Only a sculptor would have appreciated perfectly the symmetry of their modeling.

"You probably wonder why I don't go back to America oftener. All Americans ask me that. I suppose it is due to the unfortunate season I chose last time. I reached New York in August. Fancy such a thing! The crossing had been pleasant enough until we sighted land. Five hours out of New York a blast of hot air struck us that laid me flat in my steamer chair. I never felt any-

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thing like it. It came straight from the Inferno. When we got into the harbor there was a heavy fog of smoke and mist, a scent of burning tar; I couldn't see my hand before me. The only thing strong enough to penetrate this fog were some burning letters which floated in the heavens above us—an electric sign advertising laxative pills. When I landed it was no better. The streets were in a process of annihilation. A man with a red flag stopped the motor and made us back as fast as possible. The street was going to be blown up that moment. It was even worse when I reached the hotel. They shot me up a thousand feet in the air and showed me into a room filled with electric fans and sweating pitchers of ice water. Do you wonder I haven't been back since!"

When Galbraith's eyes dared rest on her face he could have sworn his heart stopped beating. Every man has in his mind's eye an ideal face which he hopes some day to find. The face may be somewhat unformulated, vague as to features and expression, but sufficiently known to be recognized the moment it is seen. Her face was the

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one he had always been looking for. Once or twice before he thought he had found it—a face he had seen pass swiftly in a crowd, the tilt of a chin, an expression in the eyes, the curl of lips, a certain curve of cheek; but no, it had never been exactly the face of his dreams. He knew now he had found it at last. It was his ideal of all that was beautiful.

He had always hated so-called classic beauty; even in his school days in studying examples of what the Greeks considered perfect types he had invariably found something lacking, something cold, unmeaningless, bloodless. Her face was everything those ancient types were not. There was sufficient regularity of feature, but there were also charming lapses from rule, little irregularities which gave individuality to her face; a strangely modulated effect of the eyes which should have been laughing yet were not; he felt laughter in them, he had even seen it—when she talked with Pasquarosa—but they weren't laughing eyes at all. In truth, they were tragic eyes, so deep, so black or brown or hazel—what color under the sun were

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they?—and so full of a vivid glow! He had the feeling that when she looked out through them she looked through so much that he knew nothing about. It was as though she had to cross another world before she reached his. Perhaps it was this which made her so remote and impersonal.

“You always hear people say Americans are so adaptable. Here I have been living in Italy more than thirty years and I’m just as American as I was the day I landed here. Italians aren’t real to me. I can’t help thinking of them as some strange race left over from another period. I haven’t a real friend among them. Oh, I have hundreds of acquaintances—but I don’t really *know* a soul—not one that I can talk to as I am talking to you. If I did they wouldn’t understand a word I was saying. No, if one is born and brought up in America, one is always American—au fond. And thank God for it!”

But her mouth wasn’t impersonal—not a bit of it! If it had been anyone else’s mouth it would have been big, the lips too red, too full. That was just her charm; she could have full, soft, red lips

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and still one could not apply the adverb "too" to them;—all because they were hers and because they were the prettiest lips he had ever seen. They had also that same baffling quality he had found in her eyes; they were meant to be laughing lips and they weren't. They rested lightly closed, not too firm, not severe in the least—much, much too human for that—and at the corners there was just the faintest suggestion of a downward curve.

"I've never been able to explain to my own satisfaction the charm of Italy. It isn't intellectual—I'm sure of that—for I have never met more stupid people raving over a place and living in it. It isn't the climate—for no trickier climate exists. It isn't its amusements, for there never was a place with less. What is it? I've given up the answer long ago."

And while Galbraith's glance rested on her lips they actually parted and she spoke—in a low voice with a gentle, very sweet inflection; it was so gentle that it was almost a caress.

She must be going. It would soon be dark. She wanted to be at the little chapel in the Campo

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Santo when the Ave Maria was rung. She had enjoyed having tea with the Marchesa so much.

That was all. She shook hands with the Marchesa, bowed to Galbraith, and was gone down the box-bordered path.

The Marchesa resumed her seat, adjusted her draperies with an eye for effect, threw a glance at the departing figure, then looked at Galbraith.

"Well," she said, "what is your verdict?"

"The most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

The Marchesa assumed great surprise. "My dear man! You do take one's breath! Don't you exaggerate a bit?"

"I don't think so. You must admit she is beautiful and—what shall I say?—a little mysterious."

"Mysterious," scoffed the Marchesa, "how absurd! You men are always saying women are mysterious. They are never so to other women. They are like an open page."

"Don't you admit she has any picturesque qualities?"

"I admit she is a very handsome woman—if that is what you term picturesque."

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"Handsome doesn't describe her at all. Handsome means something big, imposing, Amazonian. She's none of that. She's too delicate, too finely made, too sensitive to be called handsome. No, beautiful is the only word—besides mysterious."

"What is mysterious about a beautiful—if you insist upon the word—woman?—especially if she is well bred, well dressed, and good form—all of which she appears to be?"

Galbraith drew thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"What do you know about her?"

"Only what you told me and what I saw for myself. She appears to be simply an English woman living in Italy and renting a house from you which gives her free access to your garden. If you can make mystery out of that you have much more imagination than I have. There are a thousand such cases all over Italy. It is a veritable refuge for isolated, lonely women."

"Would you call her lonely?"

"Fiddlesticks! I shouldn't call her anything."

"Ah, there is where you make a very grave mistake. She is a very distinct personality. How-

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ever," again he drew reflectively at his cigarette, "lonely is the last word I should apply to her."

"Judging from your attitude, even I shall not call her that much longer."

Galbraith let this go unnoticed. He was still reflecting—and deeply.

"Do you think she is a widow?" he broke out suddenly.

The Marchesa laughed gaily. "How should I know?"

"With that wonderful understanding you say women have of each other, I should think you would have known at once."

"No, it doesn't go so far as that. Whether she is encumbered or not—I don't know. I should not call her, however"—here the Marchesa's eyes twinkled mischievously—"une femme inassouvie."

Galbraith frowned: "You think she has loved?"

"Not only has, but still does."

"I wonder why you say that!"

She was delighted with the opportunity he was giving her. "Her indifference to you. If a woman isn't in love she is interested in every man she

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meets. And you must admit she wasn't the least interested in you."

He grumbled an assent to this statement.

"Of course," the Marchesa continued, the twinkle in her eyes deepening, "she may be a prude. She may have thought, being alone here, that she must be particularly *collet monté*—at least in my presence. Alone with you—she might be more responsive. Why not see for yourself?"

"How can I? She did not ask me to call. She did not address one word to me."

"Would you take advantage of an opportunity—if it came?"

Galbraith flushed and nodded.

"Then," said the Marchesa, "if you will promise not to think that I am trying to get rid of you, I shall tell you that the chapel of the Campo Santo is just between here and your villa. She said she was going there."

Galbraith rose with impolite haste.

"The Campo Santo! Is that the little cemetery I passed on the way here?"

The Marchesa nodded and smiled. She walked

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with Galbraith to the broad steps which led down eventually to the public road.

"Of course, I suppose I shall never see you again—now that I have fulfilled my mission in life. Oh, don't look surprised! You know very well I mean bringing you two together. You won't even come to dinner with me unless I ask her, will you?"

Galbraith assured her he only awaited the invitation; he had much to talk with her about; he needed advice; he needed help; she could be a much needed friend. Then she would invite him now, for next Thursday. It would be a *dîner à deux* without disturbing personalities.

"In the meantime you had better run. You might miss your mysterious lady. *Au revoir.*"

She watched him disappear at the turn of the road; then she went back to the terrace, slowly shaking her head and smiling.

"What babies all men are! Why, the woman was an entirely different creature after he came!"

X

GALBRAITH cut out down the road leading towards the villa, increasing his pace until the Campo Santo came in sight. Then he went slowly. If she were inside, he would have to wait; if she had gone on he would also have to wait—for another opportunity.

Suddenly he stopped. What exactly did he intend doing? What was he going to say to her? Calmer judgment had finally followed upon the impetuous decision made at the Marchesa's suggestion. What he had planned was quite impossible. He couldn't force his presence upon a perfectly strange woman in this offhand manner. He laughed aloud at the primitive instinct which had counseled such behavior.

Still the road lay before him and it was the road which led to his villa—the only one, so far as he knew. The Ave Maria had not rung yet. She was evidently still in the chapel. The only thing for him to do was to pass by without stopping.

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This, of course, was exactly the thing that he did not do. When he reached the chapel he stopped again, across the road under the shade of a sprawling olive tree. It was very still. No one was in sight.

On a little peninsula jutting out from the road towards the Campagna was built the chapel and its dependent burying ground. A crumbling yellow façade faced the road; at one side of the door was a small shrine, a niche in the wall, in which stood a Madonna and Child of blue porcelain; beyond this was the iron gate which led into the Campo Santo, swung between walls high enough to shut out the view; beyond the walls towered a row of cypresses.

Galbraith viewed the scene through a long silence. It was so peaceful and isolated; the stillness held him with a pleasant sensation of restfulness. The sun sank slowly towards the sea and the pageantry of color began. A shaft of gold shot across the road and remained on the façade of the chapel; the crumbling stucco caught the fire and flamed into vivid glory; the wall of the

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cemetery became brilliant orange; the cypresses seemed suddenly to be cut out of black paper and pasted against a radiant sky. Gradually the light reached the shrine, wrapped the Madonna with its flame and kissed the flowers at her feet.

It was at this moment that Galbraith crossed the road and found a single yellow rose among the others offered there—a rose from his garden. So she had stopped there; she must be inside the chapel at that moment.

He made one step towards the door, then drew back, shaking his head.

A bell clanged out on the stillness. At first it startled him, so near was it—in the low campanile of the chapel and so harsh. But as his ear became accustomed to the sound he found it mellow and somehow rather friendly. While he listened other bells took up the message—the deep boom of the Duomo in the town, a steady clang from the Trappist monastery far up the hillside, thin voices from distant campanili. The air gradually filled with the vibrations, voice upon voice, until the whole world seemed ringing with overtones.

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A cart filled with peasants came along the road and stopped before the chapel. The men uncovered their heads; the women descended and knelt before the shrine and held up their beads as they softly chanted the Ave Maria. Then they returned to the cart and rode on towards the town.

The sound of the bells died away among the hills and vast spaces; shadows crept down from the hills; the silver of the olive trees faded; long purple shadows swept across the Campagna and engulfed everything they touched. Evening had come.

Galbraith, still undecided, though still waiting, finally saw her come out of the chapel and hurry down the road. It would only take him a minute to overtake her now; yet hesitation and indecision were still upon him. He began arguing the question. Suppose he followed her! If, in passing her, she did not invite him—not with words of course—but with some signal, a slackening of pace, some word beyond mere greeting, he would go straight on. If, on the other hand, she—— But why waste time? She was far away already.

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He was within ten feet of her now and that infernal hesitation was again upon him. Suppose she gave him that same impersonal nod—that slap in the face! His pace lessened; he was hardly walking at all.

Suddenly she turned and faced him. For a second he saw an expression of intense anxiety; then—wonder of wonders—this was followed by a smile, a smile that fluttered out as though from a window thrown wide open, a smile of unmistakable welcome.

In the conflicting emotions of the moment Galbraith was conscious of a sudden jarring note. The Marchesa's words came back to him. "Alone with you—she might be more responsive." Surely she was not going to be that sort! But this was only a thought of the moment. Her smile of welcome was too tangible to admit of any extraneous emotion.

"I am so glad it is you!"

This, mind you, was the greeting that followed the smile. Again the Marchesa's jarring suggestion. If she *were* that sort!

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"I heard your steps coming faster and faster, then suddenly slacken as you nearly reached me." Here she laughed, a low, tremulous little sound that was in reality a sigh of relief. "I was really quite frightened. Only a month gone a man was robbed and murdered on this road."

Ah, then she wasn't that sort! She was just a frightened woman ready to accept his company—or anyone's company—which would assure her safety from brigands. But why cavil! Here he was walking along the road beside her with not a living soul in sight.

"You are going quite to the town?" she asked, looking ahead and not at him.

He assured her he was; indeed, if she would permit him, he would see her to her villa. He had heard of the brigands himself—he hadn't at all—and it was not at all safe for her to be out at twilight—alone and unprotected. Then, as if by inspiration, he remembered reading in the guide book of a brigand who inhabited the hills about there.

"I've heard most terrifying tales of Gasperone."

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At this she turned and looked at him. She had the most extraordinary way of lifting her eyebrows and opening her eyes wide. They were the biggest, warmest, softest eyes he had ever seen.

"But Gasperone died a hundred years ago!"

"Oh—did he! But surely his children are living and have inherited all his bad qualities. At any rate, it isn't at all safe for you to be out at this hour alone."

They came to a turn in the road from which the Campo Santo was seen, on its jutting hill, sharply outlined against the sky. Shadows were creeping up to it from the valley, stealing down the hillsides towards it, but for a few moments still it would remain wrapped in warm light.

She stopped and looked towards it. Galbraith could not see her face; her back was to him; but he followed her glance.

"What a peaceful place to be buried!" he said, half to himself. "One would never feel lonely there."

"Lonely — I wonder," she said in a low voice,

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"I wonder if the Valdragoni are not lonely there!"

Galbraith started.

"The Valdragoni!"

"They are buried there."

He watched the lights fade quickly, first from the wall, then the chapel and at last from the top of the campanile.

When it was all gone into the dusk she turned and resumed her walk, Galbraith beside her, silent and thoughtful.

"Do you also seek an explanation of Italy's charm?" She broke the long silence, her eyes meeting his with a half smile.

"I have only been here a few days."

"Even so—you feel its charm, don't you?" This with a shade of anxiety as though a negative answer would cause her disappointment.

Galbraith hesitated. "It is so different from anything I have ever known. Have you been to America?"

She nodded. "It is an interesting country; but" — she stopped a moment — "but it has no

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color. That is what I love here. It is all color—color that warms the soul. In America one can be frightfully lonely; in Italy—never!”

Ah, then she had been lonely! But she wasn’t now; she was assuring him of that.

“I suppose, being American, you view the Campagna very much as the Marchesa’s father did—a neglected opportunity.”

“No; I am quite content to have it just as it is. I like its restfulness.”

“Restfulness,” she repeated after him as if impressed by the adjective. “Yes, it is *restful*. It is the sort of view that would satisfy one who knew life, who had lived, who had exhausted emotion and was willing at last to be a looker-on.” Then she added, after a short silence: “I suppose it would not mean much to the inexperienced—the unimaginative.”

They reached the Piazza of the town. She stopped abruptly.

“Thank you for protecting me. I think I am quite safe now.”

“I am still going in the same direction.”

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They reached the gate of the Villa Valdragone. Galbraith stepped ahead and pulled the bell. The portiere answered and threw open the gates with a ceremonious bow.

Again she stopped.

"I am afraid no one is permitted to enter the grounds after six o'clock."

"I am going to the villa," Galbraith replied quietly.

Again they walked on, side by side, the avenue of cypresses casting deep shadows about them—sinister in their foreshadowing of night.

She glanced intently at his face; her lips moved as if she were going to speak; finally she did.

"Are you a friend of the Principe di Valdragone?"

Galbraith smiled. "Yes—I think I might call myself that."

"You know him well?"

"Yes—quite well." Suddenly he saw the intense expression on her face and, thinking he understood it, smiled again. "Do you, too, think I am risking my life in associating with him?"

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“What do you mean?”

“I hear the Valdragoni are supposed to possess the evil eye. It is so terrifying, I understand, that even when the name is mentioned one must make the sign of the horns——” He stopped short as his glance fell to her hand. Her first and little fingers were stiffly extended.

He threw back his head and laughed. The sound rang weirdly through the silent garden. Then, when his eyes met hers, it ceased abruptly. She had blanched to the color of her white dress. Her hands were clasped as though supplicating him to be silent.

In another moment she had regained her composure.

“Good-night. Thank you so much.”

She turned swiftly and went into the casino.

XI

SUNDAY morning was ushered in with such a ringing of bells as Galbraith had never heard before. To the deeper tones of the more important town bells were supplemented those of all neighboring villages and monasteries. A veritable avalanche of vibration rushed through the house and gardens. The ensemble made for alarming rather than soothing announcement of a day of rest.

After breakfast he made his first expedition into the town and after an hour's walk through narrow streets took refuge at last at a little trattoria where tables and tall bamboo in tubs and a sign announcing the best wine of the country afforded an agreeable resting-place.

The central Piazza stretched before him, crowded with peasants, endimanchés—at least the men. Their sun-red faces had just been shaved; their thick black mustaches were standing upright

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at the corners as though oiled and pomatumed; their well-filled paunches were girdled with broad sashes, some red, some blue, some bright yellow. Beyond this touch of picturesqueness they were conventional enough in modern attire. A procession of women, girls and children, almost all of them with their heads covered with shawls, were going up and down the steps of the church. There was a quiet gaiety everywhere; there was too much sunlight and brilliance for anything but gaiety. A handsome race, thought Galbraith, as he watched them; handsome, carefree and wholesomely close to the soil. Quite without any effort he found himself liking them. Again the call of the blood smote him with its mysterious significance.

As he raised a glass of wine to his lips his glance was level with the church steps. There his eyes remained; for over the amber wine he saw a white figure come out from the shadows of the portal and pause while she raised a parasol. Again she was all in white, except now there was a white hat instead of a black one and a white veil that might, in hiding her features, have disguised her

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from one less interested than Galbraith. She came slowly down the steps into the Piazza. The peasants unconsciously fell apart to let her pass. How dainty, how almost fragile she appeared in contrast to the rougher types about her! Her white duck skirt, her canvas slippers, her white clad ankles and white gloved hands, all so perfect, so—Galbraith was on the point of saying chic and stopped. There was something cheap about the word that did not fit her.

She came directly towards him. He rose and lifted his hat. She was near his table now. Surely she would see him. But she didn't; she passed on without even lifting her eyes.

How dull and uninteresting the Piazza suddenly became! And this horrible wine from the Alban hills! How could anyone drink it! It left a taste of bitterness in the mouth that was poisonous.

XII

WHILE he was awaiting luncheon on the terrace the sound of children's voices floated up to him and, looking over, he found a group of them gathered in the driveway before the casino. In their midst was a nun in a black costume and the lady in white. While he watched them they started off towards the gate, the children romping ahead, the two women following and a peasant woman carrying two large baskets ending the procession.

"Do all those children belong to my *inquilina*?" asked Galbraith, when Vittorio had come to set the table.

"The Signora has no children, Principino. They are the little orphans of the Convent of the *Reparatrice*. She takes them every Sunday up to *Tusculum* and spends the afternoon with them there."

"Then she is philanthropic, mused Galbraith, or altruistic, or whatever you call it. She should know his lawyer.

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"Where did you say she took them?"

"To Tusculum."

"Where, exactly, is that?"

Vittorio walked to the edge of the terrace and pointed to the hill that began where the villa garden ended. If the Principino took the road just beyond the Villa Aldobrandini and climbed the hill he would come first to a church; if he would ring the bell at the door on the right a priest would come with a key and open the big iron gate on the left. Beyond there he couldn't possibly miss the way. There was only one road; that led straight to the top of the mountain; and on top of the mountain the path went directly to the theatre of Cicero.

"And after I've reached the theatre of Cicero—what?"

Vittorio could not repress a smile. Then the Principino would be in Tusculum and would find the Signora there.

Galbraith considered this. "How long does she remain there?"

"Until the sun is gone. The Principino will

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have time to eat his lunch and smoke innumerable cigarettes before beginning the journey. It is only an hour's walk."

"You don't think I should be intruding, Vittorio?"

"Macchè! It is the place all the forestieri go to. No one who comes here misses the theatre of Cicero."

Galbraith assumed indifference. Somehow Vittorio's keen old eyes had a lurking smile in them.

"The sun is hot today. It might be a tiresome walk."

"It is all in the shade, Principino. One has a beautiful view there of the whole of the Campagna Romana."

Galbraith felt sure of a beautiful view, though it was not of the Roman Campagna.

For ten minutes he gave his attention, at least outwardly, to a dish of polenta and small birds. If he might come upon her by chance it might go very well. A guide book carried in the hand might make the meeting appear fortuitous. It wouldn't appear too deliberately planned. If it hadn't been

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for that first remark of hers to Pasquarosa that he had overheard he wouldn't have given a hang about the meeting appearing planned. He had never been timid before where there was a charming woman. But this one was different, yes, vastly different, and he had no intention of ruining future chances of seeing her. She had said definitely that she did not want to see the Principe of Valdragone. Of course, she didn't know yet who he was; but she *would* know—some day. Still, there was the horribly long afternoon before him, Sunday afternoon at that. He could at least take a walk, and if all went well, so much the better; if all went wrong—ah, well, so much the worse!

Vittorio's directions proved exact. The shade of chestnuts and pines made the way cool; a carpet of fallen leaves and dank earth muffled the sound of his footsteps; anemones and wild hyacinths and cyclamen brightened the way; a light breeze gave a suggestion of mountain air. An old paved road at the very top of the ridge spoke of an ancient city and led him straight on to the little theatre, now only a few tiers of crumbling

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stone seats, where Cicero two thousand years before had spent his summers reading precepts to Roman youths.

In the center of the semicircle of benches, the space between the spectators and the stage, he found her with the children; they, with hands clasped and forming a circle which danced gleefully round her; she, playing prisoner and trying to escape.

She was not so fresh as she had been that morning when she had crossed the Piazza, but much, much more beautiful. Her dress was very much stained from the grass, her shoes not at all fresh, and her hair, without any protecting hat, appeared on the verge of falling down and covering her in a glowing mantel. Her face was flushed, and her voice and laughter, as it expressed both gaiety and assumed fear—all a part of the game she was playing—was as light and carefree as the children's. And she looked so like a child, indeed she was one.

Galbraith felt that he had never seen her before, at least her real self, freed from worldly

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conventions. How mistaken he had been! He had thought of her as a woman of the world, a young woman of the world, but still a long way removed from a girl. Now she was nothing else. If only her hair would come down she would be an adorable woodland nymph, surrounded by a circle of fairies! And, if you please, he had no sooner thought the desire than her hair did fall down, far down her back, almost obliterating the white of her frock. She sank down on the greensward, the children crowded about her and gay shrieks echoed about the crumbling stones.

The incidents that followed are a little blurred in Galbraith's mind. However, he remembers distinctly having come face to face with the nun, who had been sitting on the ground near him all the time. Realizing that she had been watching him and perfectly conscious of the fact that his expression must have been decidedly tell-tale, he, in his confusion, pulled the guide book from his pocket and began hurriedly reading it, upside down. Immediately afterwards, a scream from the nun made him start. Her face, transfixed with

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fear, was turned a little from him in the direction he had come. In a moment he saw the cause of her fright. A huge black ram, followed by a flock of sheep, was making directly for the lunch which she had just finished spreading on the ground. With stick raised and with a cry that was meant to be a threat of warning, he made for the ram. Some sort of a collision must have followed. The next thing Galbraith remembers is rolling on the ground and vaguely realizing that a proprietary shepherd had arrived at the crucial moment, who, with the aid of a long crook, was leading off the warlike ram and the docile flock of sheep.

The whole incident took about one minute, yet it was quite enough to arrange the rest of the afternoon most satisfactorily for Galbraith.

Once he had regained his breath and put in order his sadly disturbed appearance, he set to work to help the nun in rearranging her rather brutally handled luncheon preparations. Whilst thus occupied the lady came up from the arena and approached them. Galbraith, on his knees, was not aware of her presence until her voice, close to him,

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shot through him so unexpectedly that for a moment he did not look up.

"For the second time you have proved yourself a friend in need."

Galbraith looked up. By Jove, how charming she was with her flushed face and disordered locks!

"First—you saved me from brigands——"

"Imaginary ones," he interrupted.

"What in the world could be worse! Then you save my friend—and our tea—from a most terrible fate; perhaps all my children too—and me. Think of our being torn to shreds by a terrible ram!"

"In the theatre of Cicero—like the early Christians! But you slander the ram. He was very mild; only hungry. And you must admit the sandwiches do look good."

Her eyebrows went up, that extraordinary distance they could go. "Do you mean to say you haven't been offered one yet! Shame on you, Sister Malia." She sank down on the grass beside Galbraith and chose a napkin and placed some sandwiches on it and held it out to him.

"Are there enough to go round?"

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She laughed lightly, straight into his eyes. "How frightfully conscientious you are!"

"But—the children!"

She turned and signaled them to come; then, without rising, she slipped back and leaned against a stone pine. For a few moments she remained silent, watching the children as they rushed towards her. Galbraith, watching her, saw a new expression in her eyes; it was the sweetest thing he ever remembered seeing; it was exactly the expression he had seen in some picture, possibly of an Umbrian Madonna, in which the mother's whole soul appeared in her eyes as she looked at her child. For the moment she was all mother; devoted, tender, adoring motherhood. Another second it was gone, as she jumped up quickly to stem the onrush.

"One sandwich for each and one glass of milk," she cried out, vainly trying to control them. Then to Galbraith: "You must help me. Anyone would think they were starving. Would you mind pouring the milk!"

Would he mind! It was the very thing he was

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longing to do—anything that she might ask him; and he really did exceedingly well. He even pulled two of the little girls towards him and, while they drank their milk and looked at him through round, solemn eyes, began recalling some of the stories he had heard when he was a child. His own interest increased as he sought Italian words that would express more exactly the stories he was trying to tell them. Wonderful stories they were, too, of saints tied to trees and shot with arrows, or roasted slowly on gridirons, or boiled alive in oil, or once or twice quickly beheaded, though these last were flat, too soon finished. On the whole, the boiling oil was the most fascinating, it took so much longer to be told.

“Where did you learn Italian?”

She was standing near him and looking at him with a curiously intent expression, so intent that, as he met her eyes, he received a quick impression of something unpleasant, as though something had come between them which had again put up the barriers.

He tried to laugh away her seriousness. “I had

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an Italian nurse when I was a child. For the first time in years—perhaps twenty-five years—I am recalling the stories she used to tell me.”

Galbraith fancied he saw her draw a breath of relief; at any rate, she was no longer serious. “I never heard an American speak it as you do.”

Then she turned to the children. They were begging Sister Malia to take them up the hill beyond the theatre where a cross marked the top-most ridge of the mountain. It would be a wonderful place from which to see the sun go down. The chorus of pleading voices, with the aid of the lady in white, conquered the nun’s objections; though the lady herself pleaded exhaustion as her excuse for not accompanying them.

When they were gone she sank down and leaned against the pine tree which had begun to throw its lean shadow across the theatre, which, deserted, sank once more into its silence of centuries. The quiet of the surroundings began to wrap itself about them. Only the breeze, high up in the top-most branches of the pines, made a soft, sighing sound that was like a song.

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Galbraith, seated on the grass a little way from her, wondered if he had ever been so happy before. But why wonder! Of course he hadn't; never—in all of his thirty-five years—never—not even once. But the happiness of the moment was robbed of perfection, as it always is, by the realization that it would not last long. Already the shadows were lengthening; the sun was sinking; and he had so much to say to her. Yet he could not find a way to begin.

She, it seemed, found no difficulty. Meeting his eyes quite frankly, she put a question. "You know the Prince of Valdragone well? You are stopping with him now?"

Galbraith nodded, surprised.

"Do you——" she hesitated, then continued: "I wonder if he would be interested in a plan I have begun here—for these children." She glanced up at the summit of the hill where the group, held together by Sister Malia, were gathered at the foot of the cross. Again Galbraith caught a flash of the Madonna expression. "I have hesitated to approach him on the matter, first because I do not

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know him, and because——” Again she hesitated over a choice of words. “I should like so much to rent one of the buildings which belong to him in the town,” she went on more rapidly: “The house is rented at present. He would have to put out the present tenant. You see, it is something of a favor, isn’t it? But I am so anxious to increase the facilities of the Convent of the Reparatrice; and the building I want adjoins the convent. If I could have it I should furnish it myself and make it a delightful place for these children. Do you think he might be approached on the subject?”

“He is the most approachable person in the world,” said Galbraith, as serious as a judge. “Why not go to see him yourself! I am sure the subject would interest him. I don’t see why he shouldn’t give you the building if he knew that you wanted it.”

“Oh, I am quite ready to pay for it—if he would only consent to put the present tenant out.” Again she hesitated and avoided Galbraith’s eyes. “Would you be willing to mention it to him?”

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"I should be delighted to, only—— Why don't you?"

Her eyes were still away from his.

"I know these rumors about here — that the Valdragoni possess the evil eye. Surely you don't believe such absurd superstitions! That is only for Italians, and primitive ones at that." He waited for her response, but none came. "Surely it is not that; is it?"

"No, it is not that," she admitted slowly.

"Yet, when I mentioned the name to you the other night, I fancied I saw your fingers stiffen."

She threw back her head and laughed gaily. "You noticed that!"

"Ah, you admit doing it?"

"One unconsciously acquires superstitions in Italy. My maid always makes that sign when she speaks of the Valdragoni. Perhaps I *did* do it."

"You know you *did*."

Again she laughed.

"And for that reason you fear meeting the Prince of Valdragone. Suppose I tell him that!"

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Her voice showed real alarm. "Surely you would not do that!"

"No, I am not going to do it, because then you would never get the building. Still, I should like awfully to know why you are so averse to meeting Valdragone. On the whole, I shouldn't say he was a bad lot. He has some friends."

"In America?"

"Probably he will in Italy when he has had time to make them."

"Then he will remain in Italy?"

Suddenly Galbraith made a decision. "For the time being—yes."

"But not definitely?"

"I really don't believe he has any definite plans. Knowing him as I do, and judging from his past experiences, I should not say he was the type of man who would be happy out of his own country."

"You mean America? But isn't this, in a way, his own country too?"

Galbraith shook his head. "No, I don't believe it is. You see, he knew practically nothing about Italy until a month ago."

"Is he very American?"

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Galbraith laughed. The intensity of her questions, put quickly, with a rush as though she wanted to ask a thousand of them, flattered him immensely and puzzled him, too. Why under the sun was she so interested!

"You see, being American myself, I cannot say exactly whether he would be called, from a foreigner's standpoint, very American or not. Nor do I know what you would call American. I have always heard that you English are inclined to poke fun at us."

She appeared to consider his questions. "What I meant was, is this last member of the Valdragoni more of the new world than the old; I don't mean objectively—I mean subjectively, what shall I say?—spiritually. I was wondering yesterday as I looked across at his villa if it could possibly mean anything to him. It wouldn't to an absolutely new soul."

So she knows something about me, mused Galbraith, and she is thinking about me—just the least bit. A very good sign; a very good sign, indeed. But, being a rather modest sort of per-

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son, he wondered why. It wasn't idle curiosity; that was not in character with her. There must be some reason for her questions.

"I think the villa is beginning to mean something to him," he answered. "Of course, it didn't at first. But, little by little, it is developing, it is—— Only last night he told me that the scent of lilacs in the garden had a most extraordinary effect upon him:"

"Of course—it would," she said, her voice oddly lowered.

"Why?" Galbraith exclaimed quickly.

Her eyes wavered, then narrowed into a quiet smile. "Because—because——" Her voice trailed off into a laugh. "I suppose I meant because they are so beautiful that one could not help loving them. But you were speaking of him."

"I was only trying to defend him. Somehow I don't like to think of him as too new a soul."

"But it *does* express America. Think how new all of you are beside us."

"Then you place me in the new category and yourself in the old."

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She laughed very softly, a deliciously new laugh that Galbraith had not heard before. It was not the laughter she had used with the children—not a bit of it; this was the laughter of a fascinating woman, neither young nor old, but mellow and full of understanding. He would have liked at that moment to have taken both her hands in his and told her she was the most beautiful, fascinating lovable creature he had ever dreamed of; indeed, he was on the verge of doing it when a cry from the children announced their return.

She sprang up and began brushing off her skirt. The magic moment was gone.

“I shall speak to Valdragone to-night,” said Galbraith, as soon as he had adjusted himself to an every-day world once more. “And—shall I bring you his answer?”

“If you will. Thank you so much. It is not asking too much of you?” She held out her hand. It was the first time he had touched her. He knew he had no right to say it, but he did, just the same: “It is not half enough.”

XIII

“**LEAVE** the door unlatched, Vittorio. I shall probably stroll into the town. At any rate, do not wait up for me.”

Galbraith had spoken the truth, he had intended to walk—he needed the exercise if he expected to sleep that night—but he got no farther than the garden. Music stopped him—a pavane by Ravel. How perfectly in harmony at that moment the music was with the shadowy world about him! Sad, infinitely sad, but sweeter than anything he had ever heard.

He sat down on the moss-covered steps and listened. The music, the vague garden in which trees and flowers and fountains were blending into an unreal, indistinct world, created a mood that was new to him. He seemed to go back years and years—centuries, as the Marchesa had put it—and become a part of this land which a few weeks

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gone was almost unknown to him. But had it ever really been unknown to him! Hadn't it only lain dormant, forgotten, patiently awaiting his awakening, which it knew was bound to come!

With a rush like the sound of a thousand wings the past surged about him, enveloped him, pressed down upon him. His individual life seemed a mere incident; his thirty and more years in America a mere interlude—a time to be got through somehow while waiting for the real life to begin.

He began to think of his mother. She had known this place, it had been her home; no doubt, she had sat on the very steps where he was now seated. How strange that her life had gone out when his began! How contrary to the laws of nature that they should never have known one another. But they would *now*. He felt her near to him in this garden—for the first time. Her presence was everywhere about him now. He leaned back and closed his eyes and tried to visualize her.

The music ended, faded away into the darkness, as softly as it had come. A light appeared at the

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window of the casino. A figure passed silhouetted against the lighted room and disappeared.

He rose with an effort and went up the steps. The silence was suddenly oppressive; it was so overwhelmingly still. The deep shadows, the unfathomable darkness of the ilex grove, the towering cypresses against the sky, the loneliness, the utter desertion of the place weighed upon him. He tried to shake off that sound of invisible things all about him — the past crushing in upon today, upon him, with terrific force. He felt that he was no longer the free agent he had so lightly considered himself a few days before; in its place had come the feeling that he was going to be bound down and chained to that inexorable past, made a prisoner by it, a puppet that would move as those invisible wings directed, an actual living force which would be employed to carry out the desires of the insistent past. The future stretched before him, mysterious, vague, filled with some hidden element of terror.

Suddenly he laughed aloud—a desire to break the dreary stillness. The laugh sounded strange

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and unfamiliar. What was the matter with him! Was he actually falling under some spell! Was there so much superstition in the surroundings that he had become affected by it!

He walked on towards the cascade and half way there a light through the ilex trees caught his attention. He quickly turned towards it. A light was a sign of life, of people, of human beings—not mysterious, unseen wings—and what he most needed at this moment. He went down the path which led to a group of buildings that formed the storage-room and dairy and stables of the villa. Here, in a doorway, he made out Vittorio and Pasquarosa, both with a lighted candle in the hand and standing in attitudes of adoration before a gaily painted cart to which was harnessed a donkey.

The scene might have been an old presepio of the XVth Century. The pile of fresh straw within the door was surely from the manger, the fat, sleek donkey belonged to any period, the spell-bound attitudes of Vittorio and Pasquarosa were unmistakably those of worship, the flickering can-

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dles gave just enough light to the scene to make it appear ages old—the whole a fresco from the days of Giotto.

The two servants maintained an impressive silence; they were not even gesticulating; they were experiencing the exaltation of first possession. The donkey, a bit sleepy, unbelievably patient, flapping long ears, might have been a long awaited child of the aged couple.

Galbraith smiled. Here at least was a homely enough touch to counteract the disturbing mood of the past hour.

He stepped into the light and greeted them. They started guiltily; their faces expressed consternation. Had the Principino already returned! Was it so late! There had been no one to open the door for him! *Madonna mia*—he must forgive them!

He assured them forgiveness. When had the donkey arrived?

“Just as the *Ave Maria* was ringing.”

Was that a good omen—a moment of auspicious arrival?

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They did not know; only, just as the Ave Maria was ringing Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati had driven into the garden. What did the Principe think of their purchase?

Galbraith considered the donkey thoughtfully. He was not an expert of the stock; but to all appearances she was satisfactory, very sleek, a bit fat perhaps.

Yes, she *was* fat, Vittorio admitted; that was because Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati had wanted her to make a *bella figura*. It was probably due to overfeeding at the time she was put on the market. Would the Principino kindly look at her ears. No donkey had ever had such long ears. It showed race, pure race, bred in the mountain passes near Cattaro. Vittorio caressed them as he would the cheeks of a diletta and watched them flop to and fro, oblivious to the fact that such movement might mean irritation. And her tail! Pasquarosa grasped it with a firm hand and held it straight out, receiving for her trouble a sharp brush across the face. *Che ti possino!* The creature was of an evil education!

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"How does she call herself?" Galbraith asked, falling into the vernacular.

Vittorio assumed a thoughtful pose. "It is a question, Principino. What should she call herself? What would the Principe suggest?"

"Surely she hasn't grown to this mature age without a name!"

That was of no importance whatever. Being now in their possession the right to name her was theirs. What did the people across the world call donkeys?

Galbraith pondered. He could not recall the name of a single donkey. A horse, yes—even a mule. Ah, he had it! But he did not know the equivalent in Italian.

"What is it," asked Pasquarosa, "in the Principino's dialect?"

"Maud."

"Mauda," Pasquarosa added a final vowel and rolled the word on her lips as though tasting it. "Mauda. It is a strange name but a beautiful one. I never heard it before. Vittorio, we shall call her Mauda."

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Thus, having been given a name and accordingly taken a dignified place in the world, Mauda was led within the stable and put to bed.

When Galbraith reached the house the mysterious gloom had been dispelled. It had slipped from him like a mantel and in its place had come a sort of cheery contentment. He sank down in a comfortable chair in the large salone and looked about him as though through entirely new eyes. The change was not only within him; something external was different too. In some indefinable way he felt that this room was different. He glanced about, wondering what it could be. A bowl of lilacs caught his attention. The room was filled with the delicate scent. The sensation of homeliness crept over him again, deepened.

He put out his hand and drew the bowl of lilacs closer. He had never noticed flowers particularly, but these—how delicate, how sweet they were! He picked out one of the long stalks and sniffed it, curiously pleased, unaccountably delighted with the scent. Somehow he felt as though he had suddenly stumbled upon an old friend; a binding wave

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of sympathy surged through him; he was sure he had found something that had been lost for years and years.

Looking up, he found Vittorio watching him from the door.

"Old Vittorio knew the Principino would like the flowers," he said, coming nearer, his fine eyes glowing down upon Galbraith.

"Yes—yes," Galbraith started. "But why, Vittorio?"

"Donna Maria loved them so. She always had them in her room. She carried them in her hands. When they were in bloom she was never without them."

Galbraith rose and brushed his hand across his face. Ah, there it was again—the sound of wings—that insistent past—the presence of his mother!

"Is there a portrait of her here?"

Vittorio shook his head. The only portrait of Donna Maria was in the Palazza in Rome.

Galbraith went out on the terrace. There the scent of lilacs was even stronger. The garden must be filled with them that evening!

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He looked towards Rome and nodded. Yes, he would be going there soon, he would open the old Palazzo, he would look upon the portrait of his mother, he—— His glance fell to the casino. A light there was shining clear and steady.

Vittorio came out to close the shutters.

Would the Principino like something to drink before he went to bed—a glass of the white spumante wine from the north—or the still red wine of Tuscany.

“The still red wine of Tuscany, Vittorio.”

XIV

A FEW mornings later—or was it a week? He was losing all count of time—Galbraith was again awakened by music, but not sad music this time, at least not dreary; music from operas: *Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Butterfly*. As before, it was immensely well played; at times he thought he was actually listening to an orchestra dominated by voices—an extraordinary effect and strangely emotional; beyond that he felt in it the quintessence of Italy, the voice of all its color, its indolence, its sensuousness.

That afternoon, as he was returning from a long walk, she was playing again. He stopped before the little gate that separated the casino from the rest of the garden and listened. It was *Tosca* now, the second act, the music so filled with drama and foreboding evil. When she stopped, ending with *Tosca's* appeal "*vise d'arte, vise d'amore*" he

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had forgotten entirely that he was standing before her home, in a way that would surely call for explanation, until he actually saw her coming out of the casino towards him.

There was nothing for him to do but confess his guilt.

"I was listening," he admitted when she reached the gate, a deliciously fragrant vision of freshness, without hat, a basket over her arm. "I am so glad you are not above playing Puccini."

Her eyebrows went up that amazing distance. "Above it!" She glanced up at the ilex grove and the line of cypresses, motionless in the trembling air, black against the wide realms of sunset. "Doesn't he put all this into music!" She lifted her head slightly and breathed the heavily scented air. "His music is so perfectly Italian; so warm—so sweet—so emotional!"

For a moment he drank in her fresh loveliness, then glanced ruefully at his dusty boots and disheveled clothes. Somehow there was always something to put him at a disadvantage when he was in her presence; if it wasn't a hungry ram it was

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something worse; now it was her immaculateness and his grimy state.

"Plague it all," he grumbled, "I'm never entirely on equal terms with her. She's either laughing at me, or chaffing me, or making me feel ashamed of myself. But I'll get even with her one of these days!" Then he returned to the subject in hand.

"I suppose that's why so many people call him cheap—because his music *is* warm and sweet and emotional. But often I find him sad—almost poignantly sad."

She leaned on the gate, one hand resting on the post and supporting her chin. Her eyes, shifting about the garden, gave her the expression of deep reflection.

"Sad? Yes—beautifully sad; and sad things are always so much more beautiful than gay; they have so much more dignity."

"What an abominable theory! I don't agree with you at all!"

She looked at him with a lenient smile. "Yet you do not consider yourself a new soul!"

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Something in her manner made him feel that she was treating him much like a school boy; naturally he was not pleased, indeed he was rather offended, perhaps irritated expresses it better. She *hadn't* had *all* the experience the world had to offer; he had had a little himself.

But when he looked at her, ready to refute her statement, his irritation vanished. There it was again, that look of infinite sadness. He hated to see it and yet it touched him strangely; each time it brought him closer to her, drew him unaccountably, not with a physical appreciation of her beauty—it was more subtle than that—but with a feeling of tenderness, almost pity. He tried to throw off the mood with a burst of words.

“My theory is to persuade myself that I am happy and imagine everyone else is. If you believe that, you wouldn't find sadness more beautiful than gaiety.”

The lenient smile still lingered on her lips.

“In spite of your imagination, you know everyone else is not happy.”

She came through the gate and walked towards

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the garden in front of the villa. Galbraith went beside her. When they had reached the large lilac bushes beyond the fountain she took a pair of shears from the basket and clipped several sprays of the white blossoms. She held a spray up for him to admire.

"It is in my contract with the Principe di Valdragone to have flowers from his garden."

"I am glad you told me, otherwise he might have seen you from his windows; that—and your fear of his evil eye—might have created an unfavorable impression."

"Have you spoken to him for me?"

Galbraith hesitated. "Not yet. He has not been in the mood for it lately."

"Is he a man of moods?"

"He is just now. I think it's this villa. It has had a most extraordinary effect upon him—rather a depressing effect. You see, it is a bit sad; and being unlike you, he does not find beauty in sadness."

He sat on the ledge of the basin, lighted a cigarette and watched her as she went from one spray

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of blossoms to another until her basket was filled. When she came back to him the expression he hated was gone; though she was still serious, there was no shade of unhappiness. She came close to the basin and leaned over it and watched the mirrored landscape into which the water splashed.

"I think I know what you meant about unhappiness," she said, thoughtful. "When I was a child I used to run away from it."

"Which means that I, still being a child, still run away from it?"

She laughed softly, her eyes still bent on the water. "I meant nothing of the sort." At that moment a vivid reflection from the basin flamed up to her dress, her face, her hair. "If one is going to face life, meet it bravely, conquer it, one must learn not to run away from suffering."

Galbraith drew his brows together. What was she leading up to? He had the feeling that there was something back of what she was saying, something that she meant him to know without actually saying it.

"Then you have learned not to run away?"

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She drew her breath in sharply. "Yes, but it took a long time."

Her words appeared to Galbraith at that moment almost ludicrous; she was entirely too dainty, too delicate, to have ever come in contact with the besmirching realities of life. She seemed as far away from them as the lilacs in her basket.

"You seem to me to be the one person in the world who would and should have been protected from any suffering."

Her eyes, as she lifted them quickly and let them rest a moment in his, thrilled him. They said so much beyond thanks; they spoke so eloquently of appreciation, of almost joy, at this unexpected show of sympathy. Then her lids covered them and the glow was gone.

"It was one way of teaching me my obligations to others."

"You knew that—instinctively."

She shook her head. "But we are all thoughtless at times. There is so much we could do, so many ways we could help others—if we only took the time to think about it. And if we have suf-

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ferred ourselves we know then what others are going through, we know then how to help them." She lifted her head and a light smile flitted across her lips. "How very serious we are to-day! All on account of Puccini! I must hurry and put my lilacs in water, else they will fade."

Another side of her! mused Galbraith, as she passed out of the warm glow and disappeared in the casino. Was she to be absolutely different each time he saw her! How under the sun was he to know which time he admired her most, unless—which was exactly the case—he found each equally alluring. Strange woman! Strangely irritating, strangely interesting, strangely fascinating!

He sat there a long time after she had gone, recalling, in his fancy, her lips—so sensitive, so sensuous, through which came a warmth and perfume like the warmth and perfume of flowers; her eyes—always changing and glowing in a way that was indescribable; her words—so filled at one time with noble dignity, at another time with tenderness, and still again with an alluring playfulness. Altogether she was a vastly disturbing woman; the

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sort of woman—if one wanted to be happy and carefree and contented and master of one's own self—that should be avoided like, like—well, like a fever! If he didn't keep a strict watch on himself she would soon become an obsession. Already he spent most of his time thinking of her and always in connection with the mood that she had called to life in him. Only just then she had left him thinking of his responsibilities towards the world and anyone will admit that one's responsibilities to the world are anything but pleasant thoughts. Yes, she was entirely too disturbing. If he had been older or younger it might have been entirely different; younger, he could have given himself up to unrestrained passion, loved her violently and got safely over it; older, he might have taken her seriously, asked her to marry him and been comfortably refused. At thirty-five he could do neither; that was the middle of the stream and if he lost control goodness only knew where he might go.

Of course he was thinking entirely too much of her; but, heavens above, what was a man to think

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about, surrounded by groves of shady trees, plashing fountains, oversweet flowers, dazzling sunlight, if he couldn't think of a woman—especially when she was the most charming woman he had ever imagined!

XV

A FEW days later Galbraith dined with the Marchesa Santacasa, a Lucullan feast, served perfectly and eaten under a running fire of chatter. But before he reached her villa a strange adventure befell him, one of those incidents which set the thoughts running off into all sorts of disturbing channels.

He went on foot, and as he was approaching the Campo Santo, a white figure came out and directly towards him. He slackened his pace and was in for walking back with her to the villa, even if it did make him late for dinner—what did he care for punctuality when it was a question of being with her?—but she passed him swiftly, barely nodding, barely seeing him, and evidently not wishing to be accompanied.

She was gone in a moment, but her face, in passing, had given him a shock. She had been weeping. He could have sworn it. Her eyes were unmis-

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takably red and there was a depth of sorrow—even suffering—in them.

He stood undecided, his hat still off and in his hand. Why had she been weeping? Ought he not to follow her and say something? He shook his head. No—he had no right to intrude, even with sympathy. He sighed. Would he ever have that right—ever—ever!

Before the gate at the Campo Santo he stopped and looked in. She had come through that gate. Something within had caused her tears. He opened the gate and entered. He wandered among the graves; and at last his glance fastened on one upon which had been placed a yellow rose—from his garden. He stooped and looked for a name. It was an unmarked grave.

He brushed his hand across his eyes and stood looking down at the grave which had only a yellow rose to distinguish it from several others. So this was the cause of her sorrow! This was the sadness in her life! But how impossible! What could an unmarked grave in a little Italian cemetery have to do with her life! Surely this could not be the cause.

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It was the hour and the surroundings which had recalled some grief to her and made her weep. But the rose!

A clanging from the campanile recalled him from a world of conjecture to one of realities. He would be late for the Marchesa's dinner. Hang it all! Why had he ever accepted her invitation!

An unmarked grave! A yellow rose! Tears!

"I suppose you still find her mysterious?" the Marchesa chafed him with her merry laughter.

He admitted that as far as he had found out anything she was as mysterious as ever. She still remained unplaced, if a bit less vague and impersonal.

"Then she hasn't made a confidant of you?"

"Why should she?"

"You are her landlord!"

"If she is a good tenant isn't that enough for any landlord?"

"For an indifferent one—yes; but you are far from being indifferent."

"According to you."

She enjoyed his refutation of her accusation.

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"But you know you aren't!"

He admitted grudgingly that no man was indifferent to a beautiful woman.

She tried other tactics, equally unsuccessful, and finally came out with her own information.

"She evidently considers me more worthy of confidence than you. She has told me her entire past." The Marchesa left it at that and gave her attention to a large truffle au naturel.

Galbraith cursed his assumed indifference and wondered how he could put it aside without complete ignominy. If she really knew anything he must have it at all cost.

"Past is a lurid sort of word," he hazarded. "I hope it didn't bore you. Most pasts are tiresome—when recounted by the protagonist."

"Bore me! I should say not. It was extremely illuminating."

"Told in secrecy?"

"No—I should hardly say that." She was determined to force the question from him, and knew she was gaining ground; monosyllabic answers followed by silences was to be her method.

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"Well," this from Galbraith with a smile that was a frank confession of defeat. "Aren't you going to tell me?"

"Bore my guest with a story—a past—in which he is not interested! I am a better hostess than that."

"You know it wouldn't bore me!"

"If you are not interested in her, of course it would."

"Wouldn't it be of interest to me as a landlord?"

"Not in the least. The information she gave me has nothing to do with her bank account; though—I'll say this much—I believe it is substantial."

Galbraith, laughing, held up his hands. "You've won, Marchesa. I'm dying to hear what you know."

She met his laughter gleefully.

"Great heavens, how I had to eke it out of you! What a stubborn man you are! I don't understand you at all. You are either desperately in love with her or it is that accursed male vanity

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that has suffered. I am not going to embarrass you by asking an answer to that. I won't make you grovel. I'm going to be really generous—for a woman—and tell you all I have found out about Mary Francis."

Mary! Galbraith's thoughts raced off in a mist of conjecture. So, to use Pasquarosa's phrasing, she called herself Mary! A shade of disappointment passed over him, almost a chill. Somehow, the name was not what he had expected. It was too commonplace for her; it lacked distinction, and she was made up of distinction—distinction of line, of face, of figure. He tried to find what the name represented to him, for, say what you please, names are only a matter of association. Some men think Kate the ugliest name in the world, merely because they have been badly treated by certain Kates; while others smiled upon by these very same Kates, find it a superlatively beautiful name. No, Mary meant nothing to him. Still, it was a name with a great deal back of it—a name of traditions.

He tried to visualize her with the name. He

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imagined himself calling her Mary and her responding to it. Suddenly a picture rose before him. She was sitting with her back to a pine tree looking at the children as they waved to her from the top of the hill. He saw the deep tenderness in her eyes as she looked at them. Ah, he had it now. Mary was the name of the Madonna. That is what she had been at that moment: Mary, the Madonna.

"Are you disappointed?"

The Marchesa's question clashed into his thoughts.

"No—on the whole I don't think I am. At first—I was surprised."

"What did you expect?"

"I don't think I know exactly what I expected; it wasn't Mary, though. However, I believe it fits her—after one has found the significance."

"The significance?"

But he had no intention of telling her too much; he smiled instead of answering, rather an irritating smile, the Marchesa found it.

"So your information is limited to the discovery of her first name?" he asked, struggling to dig

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a knife into a castle of bombe Sicilienne which had just been presented to him.

“Let the man cut that for you. He is overdoing himself to-night—simply because I told him the Prince of Valdragone was dining with me. No, I have also discovered that she is a widow, bona fide; I was particular about that. No children; in fact, as far as I have been able to find out, she is quite unencumbered. With regard to family, I should say she is of good English, middle-class stock, with a dash, very distant, of something Continental—perhaps Spanish.”

Galbraith frowned threateningly. “There isn’t the least trace of anything middle class about her. There is everything that is distinguished.”

The Marchesa rose, threw him a delightfully contented smile, and suggested they have coffee in the garden.

It was pleasantly balmy there and Galbraith enjoyed the protection of the darkness, which gave him respite from the Marchesa’s too piercing eyes, if not from her too piercing questions.

He left her rather more irritated than pleased.

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She was a jolly enough old lady, but cursed with an incisive curiosity. A fixed idea seemed to have taken possession of her that something sentimental was developing between him and the lady of the casino. He would not have minded it so much if she had touched upon it lightly; but to have it driven in without a moment of rest was becoming a nuisance.

He walked home. The luminous stillness refreshed him. The Campo Santo was sleeping peacefully amid its cypresses; only the Madonna, lighted by a tallow dip at her feet, seemed awake in a somnolent world—mysterious in her silent watchfulness.

Another light was burning when he reached the villa—one in the casino. Unconsciously he connected the two—and his thoughts went racing off to the unnamed grave marked only by a rose.

XVI

GALBRAITH, without a qualm, without even questioning the whys and wherefores, gave himself up to a week of loitering. The days, growing warmer and more brilliant—it was June now—were so full of lazy, irresistible charm, that doing nothing seemed perfectly what was demanded. His conscience counselled only that, and he, under the spell, relinquished all resistance. Thoughts of the past, plans for the future, were put aside; he gave himself over to complete idleness and an odd sort of new peacefulness. The days somehow took care of themselves—a stroll through the garden in the early morning whilst the ilex trees were still fresh and varnished from the night's coolness; an hour or two in the cool, moss-grown grotto, beside the cascade, with Benvenuto Cellini to amuse him; a long walk in the late afternoon, sometimes up the hills to Cicero's theatre, sometimes along the level road to Castelvondolfo and Albano; once, taking the tram, he went quite across the mountains to Nemi.

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Often his plans were broken into by music coming from the casino ; whenever she played he would seek out a quiet spot near the casino and sit there, listening. But at the end of a week he was restless again.

One morning he wandered about the town. After luncheon, the fit of restlessness still upon him, he climbed the hill and went towards Tusculum. The theatre of Cicero once reached he threw himself down under the stone pine and closed his eyes. But somehow even this was not soothing ; it was perhaps a bit more disturbing than anything else. In desperation he tried a new road, lost his way and reached the villa from an entirely new point—over a wall directly beyond the cascade.

Still with the loitering and restless mood upon him—it was a strange combination ; when he was walking he wanted to be sitting, and when he was sitting he wanted to be walking—he wandered in and out of the grottoes surrounding the cascade and smoked innumerable cigarettes.

At last his attention was held—he thanked heaven for something besides his own thoughts—

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by the sound of voices coming from behind the hedge which hid the stables and outside buildings from view.

The voices sounded loud and angry; perhaps a violent quarrel or only an animated polemic on the subject of the weather—one never knew! Pasquarosa's voice rose clear and resonant above several others. It was far from being suggestive of Easter roses.

"Santa pazienza! The inhabitants of Monecomprati are all cretini—and you, Mario Cavalini, are the greatest of them all!"

An angry oath in an unfamiliar man's voice responded; this was followed by Vittorio's voice, violently on the defensive and ringing with a wonderful collection of pagan oaths; then all three voices together, bursting forth so loud and violent that no words were distinguishable—only the hoarse cadence of war cries. Then, quite unexpectedly, an ominous silence followed.

Galbraith drew near the high hedge. He climbed up on a stone bench and looked over.

Vittorio, Pasquarosa and a strange man were

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standing close together; their attitudes were tense and threatening; the hands of all three were still stiff with the last gesture of emphasis; their eyes, fixed, were filled with an almost savage beauty.

Galbraith decided to speak quickly; this moment of silence was evidently his one opportunity.

"What is this row?"

All three whirled and faced him, and for a second, so fierce were they, discretion counselled flight. It looked for all the world as though he were going to fall before their ire.

"Venga, Principino, venga presto—come here at once!" It was Pasquarosa who spoke, not beseeching, but commanding in such a way that Galbraith obeyed.

They waited in tenseness and silence while he came through the hedge; then, Pasquarosa, assuming a pose that was pure Greek tragedy, pointed towards the stable where Mauda lived.

"Look in there!"

Galbraith entered the stable. At first he saw only Mauda contentedly and quite peacefully munching hay; then Pasquarosa's authoritative

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and pointing finger, still expressive of Greek drama, directed his glance to a point lower down where a tiny donkey was making a hearty meal in a very different way from Mauda.

Galbraith laughed aloud. "By Jove—how jolly! I didn't know Mauda was married! My compliments to all of you!"

Pasquarosa's face was black. "Don't joke, Signor Principe, this is a most serious matter!"

"Marriage usually is, Pasquarosa."

She ignored this with a toss of her head that sent her long earrings swinging. In the interim, the strange man, rather a swashbuckling type in green corduroy and wide red sash—stepped forward, and sweeping off his broad-brimmed felt hat, made a profound bow.

"Eccellenza," he began, "ecco l'affare. I am Mario Cavalini, of Montecomprati—a galantuomo. These people bought this donkey from me. It was perfectly understood between us that I was selling them one donkey. She, the donkey, had not confided her expectations to me. Now, any imbecile can understand that for the miserable sum I re-

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ceived I could not have given them two donkeys. Therefore, Excellency, this new donkey—this asinello—is mine; otherwise they will have to pay me another hundred lire.”

Vittorio’s arms flew out in rage. “You sold me the donkey just as she was, Mario Cavalini, of Montecomprati. When I paid you the money you delivered her to me. She was no longer yours. She was mine. She is mine now and you have no more right to her or to anything that is hers than any contadino on the road.”

Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati blew out his cheeks and clapped on his hat. “If you don’t give me the asinello now, I’ll go to the Signor Sindaco.”

“And I will call in the Carabinieri if you touch so much as the end of her tail,” Pasquarosa screeched, dropping Greek drama for more effective modern pantomime.

Galbraith held up his hands.

“Silence—all of you. Go, Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati. We will settle this some other time.”

“Macchè—some other time! I shall go now to

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the Signor Sindaco!" And, with a glance at Vittorio and Pasquarosa that was an ominous curse, he swung himself slowly away.

Pasquarosa raised her head and laughed tauntingly. "Go, Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati, go!"

He stopped and threw back over his shoulder: "You will see! I will serve a processo on you tomorrow."

"Benissimo! Benissimo! The Sindaco is a just man!"

"You will see how just he is!"

"Sissignore, vedremo, vedremo!"

And until the man was out of sight—and long after he was out of hearing—she continued to scream out her jeering contempt. Finally exhausted and mopping her brow with her apron, she turned to Galbraith.

"What does the Principino think?" Her assurance appeared suddenly to have lessened.

"I think," said Galbraith, "that the whole affair is most disgraceful. I wash my hands of it. I leave it entirely to the Sindaco."

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Pasquarosa's countenance fell. She went into the stable and up to the tiny new born member of the family, and laying her hand on its shaky back, stroked it tenderly.

"I shall never, never give you up to Mario Cavalini of Montecomprati, cara mia," she said, caressingly. "Nor shall I pay him one lire for you, either."

Galbraith turned towards the house. But he had not escaped. Pasquarosa was again after him.

"Scusi, Principino—but wait a moment. Will the Principino be good enough to give a name to the innocent little asinello — as he did to her mother!"

This necessitated another return to the stable. Whilst Vittorio and Pasquarosa, freed from the malevolent influence of the villain of Montecomprati, gazed reverently and ecstatically at Mauda and her first born, Galbraith pondered.

Was there an equivalent of junior in Italian?

"But si, Principino, there was seconda."

"Ah, good. Then we shall call the little asinello

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Maud, Jr., which in her own language will be La Seconda."

Vittorio and Pasquarosa laughed delightedly.

"Benissimo! La Seconda. Grazie, Principino."

Thus was Mauda's first born christened.

XVII

WHEN Galbraith reached the house he found Signor Torrecella walking up and down the terrace. He explained that he had arrived an hour or so gone, and finding no one in the villa had passed a very agreeable time; not at all bored, not at all impatient, he assured Galbraith, pointing to a small volume which lay on a chair. The book was an early edition of Machiavelli's "Il Principe."

"Have you read it?"

Galbraith shook his head.

"It will interest you, if only to prove that man has progressed very little in five hundred years. There are very few successful men, I mean materially successful, who will not tell you that the principles laid down in this book are as necessary to-day as they were when it was written."

"Then you think we are as unmoral to-day as

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when Machiavelli chose Cesare Borgia for his hero?"

"Do you think differently?"

"You are rather discouraging. I thought we had gone towards a higher level."

The finely formed Roman head wagged dubiously. Looking across the Campagna towards Rome, his prominent, handsome eyes grew troubled. He used to hope that, too, when he was young; youth was always full of hope and trust; old age, he shook his head sadly, was a time of reflection and observation. Observation had shown him that very few, in their egoism and selfishness, thought of anything but themselves and their material success—just as Machiavelli had pointed out.

"But I have not come to deplore the unmorality of the world," he turned a little wearily from the view. "I have come to discuss questions a little more personal." He pulled out a heavy gold watch and looked at it. "With your permission I shall remain to dinner and take the ten o'clock tram back to Rome."

An hour later they were sitting in the dining-

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room, the frescoed columns and landscapes dimly surrounding them. Galbraith thought the lawyer looked older than the first time he had seen him; deep circles were under his eyes; his heavy figure appeared to sag under the weight of disturbing thoughts.

"I have thought a great deal of what we discussed the other night—about the property—about your suggestion of giving up the inheritance—of what I told you of Francesca Valdragone." He spoke slowly, almost tentatively, his eyes all the time intently bent upon Galbraith. "Have you given it much consideration?"

Galbraith lighted a cigarette and slipped comfortably back in his chair.

"I have thought of it a great deal—but I have reached no conclusion. In fact, I think I am farther from a conclusion today than I have been since I arrived here."

The lawyer's eyes glowed intently. "You mean you will not relinquish the property!"

Galbraith smiled. "No—I do not mean that—exactly. To be perfectly frank with you, Signor

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Torrecella, I don't know exactly what I mean. I am passing through a rather novel experience; I don't yet know what I want to do. Your suggestion the other night about doing something in memory of Francesca Valdragone appeals to me." He brushed his hand across his eyes, as if trying to see more clearly. "I only wish she were living now. It would make it all so much easier for me."

The lawyer started. "Easier!—how?"

"I could then turn over this inheritance to her."

"All of it?"

"All of it."

The lawyer's face lit up with an extraordinary expression. "And to think that only an hour ago I said the principles of Machiavelli were the principles of to-day!" He reached for Galbraith's hand and held it in a warm clasp. "She, Francesca, will know this."

Galbraith smiled gently at Torrecella's insistence on this point.

"Ah, you may smile, you may call me an old tottering gaga, but if you had known little Francesca as I did, you would feel as I do."

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He turned to choose one of his favorite Toscana cigars and Galbraith noticed that his lassitude of the early evening had completely disappeared; he appeared to have thrown off many years.

They strolled out to the terrace. The crescent moon, high in the west, was filling the night with a soft radiance; the air, balmy and sweet, blew refreshingly upon their faces; the whole world seemed heavy with the scent of lilacs.

They walked up and down the terrace in silence, side by side. Galbraith, each time they turned in their walk, cast a glance towards the casino. One light was burning there, in an upper room. A question was on his lips for a few moments before he asked it. Somehow, he wanted to ask it and yet was held back by a certain inhibition.

"Do you know the tenant of the casino?" It finally came.

He could not see Torrecella's expression in the darkness, and several moments passed before he replied.

"I know her slightly," his voice seemed a bit constrained. "I suppose you are surprised to find

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the casino rented—it is only for the summer months. It was the Principessa's wish to let it. There has usually been someone in it. After her death and before I had received a reply from you, this offer was made and I accepted it. The present tenant's bankers in Rome state that her references in London are excellent. Do you—would you like her to leave?"

In the darkness Galbraith smiled.

"No. I only wanted to know who she was. I have met her and I am quite satisfied to have her remain." Again he smiled over the use of the word satisfied. "Yesterday she asked me if I would rent her a building in the town attached to some convent."

Torrecella stopped abruptly. "She asked you that?"

"Yes, but I must explain that she does not know me as the Principe di Valdragone—only as a friend of his. She asked me as a sort of intermediary—to intercede for her."

"Ah!"

"I believe she is doing some sort of work among

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the children of the convent. She told me the house she wishes is Valdragone property. Also, she seems to know a good deal about the family."

"Everyone here does."

"I should like to arrange it if possible. Will you be good enough to attend to it for me?"

Torrecella nodded quickly. "I will see what can be done; though I fear the building she wishes is leased."

"Then break the lease."

Torrecella smiled. "For her?"

Galbraith was serious. "For her."

Left alone Galbraith paced the terrace. The questions Torrecella had put to him he put again to himself. What was he going to do? What were all these new influences leading to? For the first time in his life he found himself without a definite plan. Everything seemed to be impressions, some vague and unreal, some positive, most of them vastly disturbing, all of them colored—he admitted this quite frankly to himself—by the woman just across the driveway, just there where the light was burning, so near him and yet, somehow, so terribly

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far away. He leaned on the balustrade and gazed at the little casino. In the moonlight it looked unreal and evanescent, a dim spot of white in the night. How he longed to go there, at this very moment, and fetch her out into the garden with him, into the soft air fragrant with lilacs! He looked at his watch. It was already ten o'clock. Too late for a visit without an excuse. Excuse! Why couldn't he tell her that he had asked the Prince of Valdragone to grant her request and that he had consented!

Suddenly he stopped in his restless walking. At last a brilliant idea had come to him. Why was she not, of all people in the world, the one to help him carry out Torrecella's idea! She was fond of children, she was already planning something for them. Why not ask her to plan with him something really on a large scale! It was a wonderful idea! It would bring them into daily contact; there would be things to discuss every day, perhaps twice a day. How stupid of him not to have thought of it before!

He went to his room and sat down before the

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large Boule desk which had been his grandmother's, thrilled with the new idea which had burst upon him. He must make it a work worthy of her interest; something that would intrigue; something that she would put her heart into—with his.

He found the key Torrecella had given him and opened the drawer where he had placed the papers pertaining to the inheritance. His idea was to make a list of the various properties with a view to discussing the matter with Torrecella tomorrow. He would even go into Rome in the morning and ask him to prepare definite plans.

He opened the large envelope in which the lawyer had tied the documents. How significant these faded bits of paper were; how suggestive in their musty scents of passions and personalities long dead!

Francesca Valdragone! The name caught his attention. He spread the letter out before him. To it was attached a seal and a legal document proving the validity of its contents. He began reading it with keen interest. This was the letter Torrecella had told him announced the death of

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Francesca. How short it was, how curt, how cold! A few lines only, written in English, informing the lawyer that Francesca Valdragone had died in the writer's house on such a date and that he was being informed, at her request, made on her death-bed. A mere record of death! Not even a word of sympathy! The sort of promise one makes to the dead and carries out before it is forgotten!

Gradually, without special interest, Galbraith's eyes reached the signature. Francis. Mary Francis. He was so accustomed to thinking of her without name that at first the signature had no significance. Then the realization came with a rush. Could it be possible that she was the same woman who had written the letter? If so—— His thoughts flew off in the wildest fancies. There must be some purpose in her coming here. The more he thought of it the more he became convinced that there was a great significance in her presence here. Everything pointed to it. He understood now why she had asked him so many questions about the Prince of Valdragone; he recalled how these questions had shown some knowl-

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edge of the subject; they had been put pointedly; they had all led towards something. What? If she had known Francesca Valdragone and had been the one person to whom the address of Torrecella had been entrusted, then she evidently knew the girl's story. What reason then had brought her back to the scene of the girl's parentage? What was her object? No wonder she did not wish to meet the Prince of Valdragone if she judged him by the story she knew of his grandmother.

Yes, it was all quite clear now. Finding this letter had put him in an entirely different position. He could go to her now, tell her who he was, and ask her help all the more readily in carrying out Torrecella's plan. If she had been with Francesca when she died she had evidently been her friend. The whole plan was working out beautifully. Everything now had its *raison d'être*.

Galbraith went to the window and looked out. Her light was still burning. She, too, was awake. Why, oh why, are we so tied and fettered with conventions! It would be the most natural thing in the world for him to go to her now and make a

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clean breast of the whole matter. A primitive man would have done it; but, after all, these are not supposed to be primitive days.

Just as he turned away, sighing at the impossibility of ever doing anything at the moment he wanted to, the gate of the casino clicked and swung open. A man came out and went down the driveway. Galbraith leaned farther out of the window. He could have sworn it was Torrecella.

XVIII

GALBRAITH rose early—as a matter of fact he had hardly slept at all—and went into the garden. Again convention smote him. Why couldn't he go to her now, when the day was fresh, when all nature and his mind were clear, while he was dressed in spotless linen—like Petrarch when he called on Laura—and talk to her as frankly as the trees and the birds and the flowers were talking to each other! But of course she wasn't up. The little white casino was sound asleep in its grove of magnolias.

He looked at his watch. It was just a little after seven. Hours to wait! Even so, after the dreary hours had passed, what was he going to do—how approach her? Would she come into the garden, would she go that morning to the convent, would she receive him if he took the matter in his hands and called on her?

He wandered about disconsolately. He saw her

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in everything his eyes rested upon; though, almost always, as he had seen her that day at Tusculum. That was the impression that seemed most insistent. Leaning against the pine tree, her eyes not for him but for the children, her expression sad, yearning, tender—that was the way he seemed to see her now. The memory touched him more than the actual moment had. There, before him, her presence, her loveliness, her warm beauty were confusing; his impression of deeper significance, of mental aspects, had been blurred by her physical nearness. Looking at her he could think of nothing but her beauty. Afterwards, he saw more; he saw much that he was not aware of at the moment; and the impression that remained was that of the Madonna in her eyes, that expression of infinite love and tenderness.

He walked down the avenue to the gate and talked an interminably long time to the portiere about everything under the sun. She *wouldn't* awake and come out of the house. In desperation he went into the town and lounged through another hour; then, resolute, he went back to the villa,

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drank his coffee, saw it was nine o'clock and, with shoulders set in soldierly fashion, deliberately walked across the driveway and rang the bell at the casino gate.

The trim maid, in cap and apron, appeared. Yes, Mrs. Francis was at home; she did not know, though, if she was receiving. What name should she give?

Galbraith had not thought of this complication. He hesitated; then he drew out his card case and found the cards he had brought with him from America. "Say Mr. Galbraith—from the villa," he added the last with an explanatory nod towards the house.

The maid returned in a few moments and conducted him through a small green door, almost hidden beneath a vine covered with white roses, into an entrance hall and thence into a large room that extended the full length of the house.

The first thing that struck him was the scent of lilacs, and with it came that sweeping sensation of contentment, of happiness, which he had felt in his own house.

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So, at last, he was under the roof that sheltered her! In a room that was evidently the result of her preference!

He looked about eagerly. He wanted to see it all before she came in. It was wholly different from any room in his villa. His first sensation was that of having entered a home; the second was the realization that everything bore the definite stamp of a woman's presence—a woman of refined interests. Nothing appeared fortuitous; there was choice and tastes everywhere; there was coordination, and most of all there was hospitality and friendliness and comfort. Slowly details began to take form in his impressions; a low, raftered ceiling—an XVIIIth Century design of walnut brightened with much gold; walls of stucco, an indefinite color, a sympathetic background for several large pictures, evidently done by a Venetian painter framed in narrow, light colored moulding, representing amusing scenes from Goldoni's comedies; a massive piece of wood carving, rather crudely executed and painted light blue and yellow, filled the space above the

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small marble mantel; flambeaux of delicately chiseled and painted iron, almost bouquets, hung upon the walls; two divans, deep and filled with pillows, covered with a gay design of chintz framed the fireplace; a grand piano stood well towards the centre of the room; a large Bologna table, covered with hand-tooled antique leather objects, served as a writing desk; small tables appeared here and there, each with a lamp and books and always a bowl of lilacs; indeed, books appeared to fill the room, not that it would have been called a library, though they cropped up everywhere, on shelves, on tables, on the piano, and one even lay open on the divan beside the fireplace.

So this is where she lives—and these are the things she likes—and this is where she spends her evenings—and this is the piano she plays upon—and these are the books she reads—and she, too, is fond of lilacs! mused Galbraith, sniffing the lilacs and touching now and then with reverent hands some object which his fancy suggested she might have touched that morning.

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How beautiful it all was! How much more beautiful it must be with her there in the midst of it!

He turned over some pages of her music, he examined the amusing Venetian pictures, he finally picked up the book which lay open on the divan. Pater's "Marius, the Epicurean." Ah, he might have known it! There was something in Pater's cool aloofness that perfectly matched hers. You felt the warmth, you knew it was there, but how to reach it!

He began reading at the open page: "It was the expression not altogether of mirth, yet of some wonderful sort of happiness—the blithe self-expression of a joyful soul in people upon whom some all-subduing experience had wrought heroically, and who still remembered, on this bland afternoon, the hour of a great deliverance."

"You like Pater?"

She was quite near him when he heard her voice. She had come in so quietly, the sound of her voice was so, in a way, unexpected, he was

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so unprepared for her presence that, as he stood up and faced her, he felt a rather embarrassing restraint sweep over him. Her smile of modulated welcome, however, sent embarrassment to the winds. Her hand rested in his for the most fleeting of moments.

"I don't know Pater well," he finally answered her question. "I have read a little in this book; but somehow he always gives me the feeling, how shall I say it, of sitting in a large cool chamber listening to the rush of the world just outside the window." Then he added, smiling: "It is not the life of a new soul."

She answered his smile. "The American soul?"

She sank down on a divan and glanced through the open window. "One might say of this room what you have just said of Pater. It is cool and large, and surely, with Rome always in view, one has the world there to listen to."

Galbraith chose a seat on the divan facing her. For a few moments a silence passed between them; then, her lids lifted and her large, disturbing, beautiful eyes were upon him.

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"You have come to tell me that the Principe di Valdragone will or will not let me the building?"

The question or assertion, for it was more that, took Galbraith by surprise. He had quite forgotten it. With it, however, came a sudden wish on his part to prolong his incognito. After all, he hadn't the slightest idea what her attitude would be after she knew who he was; and her present one was far too agreeable to rush madly into the unknown.

"I spoke to him—yes." He looked at her steadily. "I think he wishes to speak to you himself about it."

Her lids fell. "Why?"

"I really think he suspects you are afraid of him."

"Afraid!"

"Of his evil influence, his evil eye, his inherited malevolence."

"How absurd! You should have told him I wasn't."

"Yes, but you must remember I saw you make the sign of the horns when I mentioned his name."

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I also heard you tell Pasquarosa the first night he arrived that he was the last person in the world you wanted to meet."

Her face, her throat, her neck changed swiftly into a deep flush; then, as quickly, the color subsided.

"My cause then is lost," she said, so frankly disappointed, so grieved, that Galbraith began to regret the road he had pursued.

"No, I shouldn't say it was so bad as that. Only, as his ambassador, I wish it were possible to change your opinion of him."

Once more her eyebrows lifted that amazing distance and she smiled at him. "Perhaps you have—already."

Galbraith's heart gave a terrific bound and he spoke without any further consideration of danger ahead. "I might as well tell you at once. I spoke to my lawyer last night."

The smile was still on her lips and remained, even after her next words: "*Your* lawyer?"

It was now Galbraith's time to flush, and he did. She had evidently taken the allusion to be

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a confession of identity; and the smile showed ever so plainly that she had not been taken by surprise. Their conversations came back to him with a rush and with them the resentment of a man who had been checkmated at his own game. She had been playing him all along; making a silly ass of him; laughing at him. His flush grew deeper.

"Then you knew?"

Her lids fell; she remained silent.

"All the time?"

Still she was silent.

Her silence brought a certain relief. Perhaps she hadn't known all the time; perhaps he had not made such an ass of himself after all.

"Would you mind telling me when you first knew?"

She hesitated. "Let me see. Perhaps it was the day you walked home with me from the Marchesa Santacasa's. Of course I knew there was no one else stopping at the villa."

The flush had not yet faded from Galbraith's face.

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"I suppose it was very stupid of me not to realize that. I suppose—I thought it rather amusing."

"Letting me, even drawing me on, to talk about you?"

"You were discretion itself."

"Then why did you spoil it?"

"Have I?"

"For yourself—I mean."

He turned the pages of the book beside him. Perhaps he *had* spoiled it—in a way. Certainly she was different this morning from the former meetings; quite as much at ease but infinitely less spontaneous. Of course she was now in her own drawing-room, under her own roof, and before she had been out in the open. Convention again! Still, there was something else, a sort of assurance which gave her the upper hand.

"You forget you hadn't told me who you were, either," he rather grumbled in self-defense, not expecting to see the flaring of lights in her eyes. She half rose, then settled back on the divan. His earlier constraint appeared to have passed to

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her. Her voice, when she replied, had altered strangely.

"I don't think I understand."

"I didn't know who you were either."

"You didn't know!" She stressed the past tense.

"I don't know yet."

At this she sank back comfortably on the divan. "When the Marchesa presented you to me she mentioned my name."

During the silence that followed Galbraith received the impression that she meant him to infer that this was all there was to tell; at least all that she was going to tell him. If he had called for any further reason, her silence was evidently meant to afford him an opportunity to speak.

He broke into the heart of the matter. "Perhaps you are wondering why I came to see you this morning. It was not so much to disclose my identity—what an alarming phrase!—nor to tell you that the building you wish is yours; there was something else. The fact is, I've come to ask your help."

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"My help!" Ah, she was smiling again! "And it has only been a short time since I asked yours!"

"I've come for advice."

She opened her eyes wide. "To me?"

"I believe you are the one person I know who can give it me—the sort I want."

She reached for a silver box of cigarettes on the table near her and held it out to him. He lighted a cigarette and resumed his seat opposite her.

"You *do* know something of my family?"

"Isn't it my duty—since you are my landlord?"

"Now you are laughing at me again," he tried to frown and failed. Who could frown while she was smiling! "Whether I am your landlord or not, I am sure you know a great deal; but perhaps not all the strange experiences that I am passing through here. The last one is my reason for coming to you."

Her eyes, meeting his steadily, were now strangely intent, as though some lurking apprehension had suddenly sprung into life.

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"Last night I was looking over some of the papers that Torrecella, my lawyer, left with me. Among them I found a letter which announced Francesca Valdragone's death. It was signed Mary Francis."

Galbraith saw her rise, glide across to the piano and sit on the bench so that her back was to him. Her head, slightly lowered, bent over some music.

"You understand, I hope, that my reason for asking is not idle curiosity!"

She did not reply. With her head still lowered, one hand resting on the keys of the piano, she appeared to be awaiting his further questions.

"You *did* know her?"

Her head barely inclined.

"You wrote that letter?"

Again the silent affirmative.

Galbraith drew in a long breath of relief.

"The idea came to me last night, even before I found the letter, that I could go to you for help. Not that I had any reason; it was in-

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stinct, I think—and your interest in children. It seems almost as though you were sent by fate to help me make the reparation due Francesca Valdragone.”

She rose quickly from the piano and crossed to the window, her face all the time away from him.

“Reparation!” The words were spoken with an incisive bitterness. “Do you know her story?”

“Torrecella told it me.”

“Then why speak of reparation! She is dead.”

“But——”

“There is nothing you, or anyone else in the world, can do.” She turned and faced Galbraith, calm, pale, and splendid with a new, imposing dignity. “I must ask you not to speak of this to me. It is too—too painful.” Her voice caught and she stopped a moment. “It all belongs to the past. You can do absolutely nothing.”

“You don’t understand me,” he answered quietly. “I can imagine what you feel. But you must remember, too, that I feel something—most

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of all a horror of the injustice and cruelty that was shown towards her. After all, she is closer to me than to you; she is a member of my family. Surely if you knew her and loved her, you will not let your hatred of the family, now represented by me, keep you from doing something in her memory! I do not claim any sympathy for the idea; it is all Torrecella's. But it has touched me rather strangely. It seems to be the one thing I want to do while I am here. Surely you can't refuse to help me. Did you not come here to the scene of her childhood for some purpose?"

Again Galbraith caught the strange apprehension in her eyes; and while he watched her, silent and troubled, the tears welled up in her eyes and hung like dew on her lashes.

"I came—I came here," her glance shifted to the open window and through it to the world beyond, and beyond that to the world Galbraith could not see, "because of a promise I had made to her. I beg you will not ask me anything more." She brushed her handkerchief across her eyes, then, struggling to smile, extended her hand

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to him. "I am going to ask you not to speak of this to me again. I understand what you mean when you speak of reparation. But it is too late."

"I don't think you quite understand Torrecella's idea."

She withdrew her hand from his and held it up pleadingly. "Perhaps not; but I feel that I know better than anyone Francesca Valdragone's wishes. Her one desire was to be forgotten. Would it not be wrong for us, knowing this, to drag back from the past her name and her story?"

Galbraith, slightly bewildered, realized that at this moment he could say nothing more. With a murmured word or two, he picked up his hat.

Once more she held out her hand, this time with obvious relief.

"Thank you for coming. Thank you for what you meant. I have expressed myself badly—you may not understand—but——"

Galbraith raised her hand to his lips. "Some other time——"

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She drew her hand away quickly.

"No—there must be no other time. You must never mention this to me again. You must trust me. *I* know. *You* do not. The way for you to show your sympathy for Francesca Valdragone is to leave her in the past—forgotten."

XIX

GALBRAITH, still bewildered and filled with strangely conflicting emotions, made his way out of the house, through the gate and into the arms, figuratively speaking, of the Marchesa Santacasa, who was descending at the moment from her victoria.

"Pon my word!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea the affair had progressed to the extent of visits in the early morning. It is either compromising—or a declaration."

With an effort Galbraith forced himself to answer in her vein.

"Neither, I assure you; purely business."

"Nonsense! You can't prove it."

"I can and will. She wants to rent the house adjoining the Convent of the Reparatrice."

"Well?"

"I called to let her know she could have it."

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The Marchesa lifted her lacy parasol and nodded towards the fountain. Together they walked to it. The Marchesa arranged her draperies and sank down effectively on the stone ledge.

"I'm dying of curiosity. Have you told her who you are?"

Galbraith nodded.

"How did she take it?"

He made a wry face. "She knew it all along."

"You dear, ingenuous boy!" The old lady's laugh sounded merrily on the still, warm air. "It does my old heart good to see how easily we pull the wool over your eyes. The idea of thinking she didn't know! Well—what else?"

"Nothing. What else could there be!"

She sighed and looked about her. A garden like this, magnolia trees in bloom, roses everywhere, up there a cool grove of ilex trees, beyond a cascade of nymphs, his house there, hers here, golden sunlight, solitude, Italy! What else was necessary! What more did he want!

Galbraith shook his head gloomily. "You don't understand."

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"What is it I don't understand?"

"Something I don't understand either."

"Dear me!" the old lady's eyes gleamed.

"How mysterious you are!"

"Yes, that expresses it exactly. How mysterious we are! How mysterious everything in life is!"

She turned and looked at him with a softer expression in her eyes. His whole attitude was one of unself-consciousness. His hands were clasped between his knees; his head was lowered; he might have been a thousand miles away from any human being.

The Marchesa shook out her lacy parasol and rose. If there were nothing more to be had from this source—and it appeared to be quite that way—she would lose no time in sounding the other.

"I must be off. I am calling on her by appointment," she nodded towards the casino.

Galbraith walked with her to the little gate.

"When are you coming to dine with me?" he asked

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"The first evening I have free," she retorted gayly, "which is the one you ask me."

"Then tomorrow?"

"Yes — with pleasure." She looked about as if hunting for eavesdroppers, then lowered her voice. "But not alone. I couldn't risk that. It might be found out; and at my age it might create too much talk. If I were younger—yes. These Italians are frightfully maldicenti. A woman's age is no protection—whatsoever. No matter how old she is——" She gave Galbraith her twinkling smile. "Between you and me, I think it rather nice of them; don't you? I love living in a country where one is never looked upon as too old to be in the running." She looked towards the casino through a pause which appeared to be one of consideration. "Seriously, though, I must be chaperoned—and by my partner in conspiracy."

Galbraith's radiant smile was shockingly uncomplimentary. "Do you think she would come?"

"Why not?"

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"Will you ask her?"

"What an idea! What is the matter with you this morning? I'll not ask her—but I'll prepare her for the invitation."

"And make her promise to come?"

"And make her promise to come."

Her hand was on the gate and she had just started up the walk when she stopped and signalled Galbraith to return.

"It had better be done while I am here. After I have blazed the trail, you come in to fetch me for some reason—I leave it to your younger imagination to find one—and while there ask her to dinner."

"But suppose I come in at the wrong moment! Everything would be lost."

The Marchesa nodded and considered this. Then she pointed to a large red rose on a vine near the gate. "Bring me that."

Galbraith plucked it and handed it to her.

"Now, when the ground is fallow, I shall throw this out the window. You, waiting near the fountain, will see it and come immediately. But, mind

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you, don't lose any time. Psychological moments with women are not of long duration."

Galbraith held her hand to his lips. "You are the best friend I have in the world."

"And you—you are becoming more Italian every day. My poor old head is actually being turned. Arriverderla."

Galbraith went back to the fountain and sat down.

Would she accept his invitation? If she did it would mean everything. First of all, it would mean that she was willing to know him as a Valdragone, willing to accept hospitality from him, willing to be a guest in his house. It would surely mean that the barriers were at last down. After that—— His thoughts raced off in a thousand directions. Explanations would come gradually; but of course he would leave them to her. He would leave everything absolutely to her; he would not even ask Torrecella if it were he he had seen leaving her house the night before. That would be disloyal to her. What she wanted him to know she would tell him; what she did not want him to

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know should remain a sealed book. It was not her secrets he wanted; it was only her presence, her graciousness, her smiles.

How the minutes dragged! The Marchesa must have already been with her an hour.

After all, she had only forbidden him one subject. He thought he understood her reasons for that. It was a painful story even to him. He detested the thought of one of his family acting in such a brutal way; and if he, a member of the family, should feel so, why should not a stranger who had heard the story resent it more deeply. He even began to wonder if her attitude were not a friendly one towards him; if, in eliminating the subject, she were not protecting him from her prejudices.

Finally, it must have been hours later, the rose fell at his feet. He smiled, picked it up, stuck it in his buttonhole and went to the gate. The English maid again answered his call.

"I have an appointment to meet the Marchesa Santacasa here. She is expecting me."

Once more he entered the cool, spacious room.

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They were sitting on the divan and looked up when he entered with almost ridiculously contrasting expressions; the Marchesa's a broad smile; the other's a bit troubled beneath frank surprise.

The Marchesa rose at once.

"You are very prompt and I shall not keep you waiting." She turned with explanations to Mrs. Francis. "He has asked me to go with him this morning in search of some tapestries I have heard are for sale." She finished the lie with a brazen smile at Galbraith and gave him to understand it was his time to speak.

He cleared his throat. "The Marchesa is dining with me to-morrow evening. I—I should be so glad if you would honor me too."

Her eyes showed her surprise and a slight consternation at being taken unawares.

"Now don't say no," the Marchesa put in before there was time to reply. "If you do, it will really be a tragedy for me."

"A tragedy—for you?"

"Yes, nothing less than a tragedy. I can't possibly dine with him alone—in Italy."

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For a second her beautiful eyes shifted from the Marchesa and in the end she smiled.

"I should do anything in my power to avert a tragedy—even to accepting a delightful invitation. I shall come with pleasure."

Outside, the Marchesa gave Galbraith a vicious pinch on the arm.

"You have absolutely ruined me. She will never have a shred of confidence in me again. Why, in the name of heaven, did you stick that rose in your buttonhole?"

"But—what difference——"

"What difference! Hadn't I been holding it in my hand all the time I was talking to her! Hadn't she asked me if I picked it from her vine! Didn't she tell me she had been watching it unfold for two days! Didn't I tell her my garden boasted hundreds more beautiful! And just to show my disdain didn't I rise and throw it out of the window! And didn't you walk in two minutes later wearing it in your buttonhole! Did I say you were Italian? Well, I lied. You would never find an Italian doing a stupid thing like that."

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"You don't know how sorry I am," Galbraith apologized humbly.

"You will probably be sorrier later. I don't doubt she is writing you a note now—of regrets. Of course she saw it was a plot between us."

XX

GALBRAITH spent the morning consulting Vittorio and Pasquarosa about the dinner. First, he wanted to know if it were possible in Italy to prepare a meal without *maccheroni* appearing in a single course.

The question was a disturbing one. The servants looked at each other with eyes that showed not only bewilderment but also wonderment that anyone, even a mad foreigner, should consider, even call, a meal a meal without *maccheroni*. If the Signor Principino insisted, of course it could be done; but what in the name of the Sainted Mother could take its place!

Well, to begin with, a soup, a clear soup.

Va bene!

Then fish, perhaps fresh sardines, brought that day from Nettuno.

Si signore.

After that a roast.

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Would the Principino like a young pig from the Campagna?

The Principino would not; he preferred lamb; there was very excellent lamb—also from the Campagna. Then a chicken, with salad and that very good confiture made of nespole. The sweet must be something frozen.

Si, si, it could be bought from the trattoria in the Piazza—granite di pesca. And the wines?

He would like real wine which, in his interpretation, was wine from France; to Vittorio, wine which had been made originally in Italy, then put into the hands of foreigners who did strange things to it, poisoned it, watered it, bottled it and returned it to Italy to be sold at a fabulous price. Dio mio. What strange tastes these foreigners had!

The two servants went away troubled. But the Principino was master and must be obeyed. Pasquarosa thought it over most of the day and discovered at the last moment, to her deep joy and satisfaction—to this she attributed the success of the dinner—that maccheroni could be surrep-

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tiously introduced into the menu. The Principe had said clear soup, but she couldn't serve it without anything at all; it must have something in it. Why not little strips of maccheroni!

Galbraith overlooked the table himself. Sprays of lilacs fell gracefully from a crystal bowl. They were also about the room in every conceivable place. Four candelabrum lighted the table and shed a subdued light, which created limitless perspectives and carried one's thoughts off into a vague world.

The Marchesa arrived first, in gorgeous array, puffing a little as she appeared from the circular staircase. A tiara sparkled in her elaborate coiffure, three strings of enormous pearls adorned her neck, an historical emerald burned warmly in the laces on her bosom.

Galbraith bowed low over her hand and kissed it.

"That isn't American at all," she pretended to be displeased.

"I'm trying to be Italian to-night—to please you."

She unfurled a tiny jeweled fan. "Only me?"

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"Only you—my countrywoman."

She stopped before a large mirror and surveyed herself, giving a few last touches to her hair:

"Are you pleased with me to-night? Am I doing you credit? Are you saying to yourself: No one would ever imagine her father had made his money out of patent medicine!"

"Don't spoil it all!" cried Galbraith.

"Spoil it—fiddlesticks! I only wish he had. I might then have been able to buy the Gazzi emeralds. No, unfortunately," this with a sigh, "he only made it out of lumber. But truly, I wanted to be in the picture to-night. Do you realize this is the first time a Valdragone has given a dinner, let me see, for at least fifty years!"

"Heavens, another responsibility on my already sagging shoulders!"

She put up her face-à-main and looked him over.

"You look uncommonly well in evening clothes," her eyes twinkled behind the glasses, "and very Italian—yes, you do really. The sun is bringing out your color. Like all Americans, when you

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first arrived you looked underfed. When I see them fresh from their beloved U. S. A. I invariably think of pies. Their pallor is just that color." She turned towards the columns of the loggia and viewed the cascade in the distance. "What a superb garden you have here. When will you begin putting it in order?"

Galbraith mildly suggested that he might leave it just as it was.

"You mean you are not going to clean it up!"

Why should he?

"Do you know, I have a suspicion that you will not remain here. Perhaps you are right. I am beginning to think Italy is only a country for old people. There is too much sun for the young. It saps the energy." She trailed along beside Galbraith as he led the way into the grand salon. "Am I to be your only guest to-night?"

"Suppose I said I hoped so?" Galbraith smiled.

"It wouldn't be worth while. Did you receive regrets from her?"

"Not a word."

And as they spoke of her, she came in, in flow-

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ing black draperies, her arms and shoulders glowing like alabaster in the soft light, an immense fan of black ostrich feathers unfurled in her hand, her eyes, even as she greeted first the Marchesa, then Galbraith, almost thirstily drinking in the surroundings. Even when the greetings were over, accomplished on her part with a silent smile, she passed a little beyond them until she stood where the full vista of the garden and cascade opened before her.

"Superb!" whispered the Marchesa to Galbraith.

He nodded, watching her with pounding heart.

The Marchesa then tried a remark, something about the view being superb, which elicited no reply from her; another attempt was resorted to. "What do you think of a man who is going to leave all this as soon as he can?"

Ah, she turned finally and faced Galbraith! Her question was only a murmur. "You are returning to America?"

"The Marchesa accuses me of such plans; she even advises such procedure."

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"Why?" she faced the Marchesa.

"I said I was beginning to think there was too much sun here for young people."

She bent her head thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right."

Vittorio, in his new livery, bought at Galbraith's order, announced dinner. He was full of imposing dignity as he stood at the door and bowed as they passed in. He too was well aware that this was the first dinner given by a Valdragone for fifty years.

Seated at the table, the candle-light blending softly with the twilight without—that subtle meeting of man's and nature's light—Galbraith looked at the woman to his left. Again he found her different, different from ever before, more resplendent than he had ever seen her or imagined she could be. The beautiful line of the neck, her slim throat, her delicately rounded bosom rising and falling beneath the transparent draperies of her gown, her perfectly tapering, almost thin arms—all drew him to her. He could hardly shift his glance from her and, strangely enough, she met

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his eyes frequently and steadily and more intimately than ever before. It was as though she were trying to see beyond mere surfaces deep into his real being.

Once or twice he met the Marchesa's laughing, meaning glance, and, in spite of himself, flushed, resenting her too evident intuition; though, thank goodness, his other guest appeared unconscious—or indifferent—to it.

The conversation might have languished but for the Marchesa's running chatter; it went on like the water in the fountain just outside the windows. In a way he was glad of it. It gave him time to think and he needed that just now, for the realization, or admission, call it what you will, had at last burst fully upon him. The woman beside him dominated his life. Nothing else mattered now. Without her life would be stale, barren, without object; with her—ah, that was too much to grasp in moments!

Yet, oddly bewildering him in this moment of thrilling happiness, was the consciousness that something still was missing. No matter how much,

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how deeply he might love her, he had the feeling that she was still remote, quite apart from his existence. The binding tie had not yet been found, yet it was there, he was sure of that; it had been always within his grasp from the beginning though he had not known how to seize it. Surely something was alive in both of them which had created this emotion in him from the moment he first saw her. He wondered, meeting her eyes in one of the moments when he felt they were alone in the world, if she knew. Was not her searching glance a groping on her part to find that tie! Could they not together find it! It must be found! He was filled with excitement all through the dinner, feeling that something was there between them, a third guest, an invisible spirit which was calling to his inner consciousness for recognition.

"What an extraordinary thing fate is," he heard the Marchesa saying. "Here you are, an American, suddenly picked up out of your rushing life and transported on a magic carpet to the most beautiful place in the world."

"But fate, Marchesa," the low voice answered

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beside him, "is only character. If Mr. Galbraith"—it was the first time he had heard her refer to him, and her choice of names made him wonder a little—"if Mr. Galbraith had been a different character he would not have come. He would have sent someone in his place—or written."

For some reason he was vastly pleased; though he would have been pleased at anything she said. But she had not finished:

"If we know a person's character, we can almost predict that person's life."

"I don't agree with you at all," scoffed the Marchesa. "Take one's character—and one's nature, one's inclination. For example, a deep sense of honor is character; a sensual temperament is nature. Put the two in one person; what then?"

Galbraith listened eagerly for her answer.

"An unhappy life—a life of reparations."

Vittorio passed an elaborate arrangement of fruits—purple figs, emerald pears, golden peaches.

"I wonder if I could apply such a theory to you two," the Marchesa hazarded, her eyes snapping from one to the other.

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Galbraith held up his hands. "Please don't. Personalities are so disturbing."

"And so amusing," the Marchesa smiled over a fig which she was eating in true Italian style, having cut it in two and bit out the centre with her teeth. "You, I should say, might suffer and fight the inevitable; and you—would suffer and accept."

Again he awaited the response which came so close to him. "Isn't that every woman's fate!"

"Not today, my dear, nor tomorrow—far from it!"

They drank their coffee on the terrace, sitting in the full radiance of the moon, much to Vittorio's alarm. Again mad foreigners! Fancy an Italian sitting brazenly in the full moonlight! But you couldn't; they know it turns one mad.

The Marchesa was determined to see the villa in detail. Italian moonlight was all very well and exceedingly beautiful—she was the last person in the world to deny that—but she was familiar with it, whereas she had looked from the outside upon the Villa Valdragone for many years without hav-

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ing once set foot within its walls. It was an opportunity she had no intention of letting pass unprofitably.

Galbraith suppressed a frown at her request—it was perfect in the moonlight with the woman he loved beside him—but there seemed no way out of it. He called Vittorio and, being preceded by him, holding a large lighted candelabra, they went into the house.

For a second he thought Mrs. Francis was going to remain on the terrace, then, almost with a visible effort, she rose and followed them. As they passed from room to room he still had eyes only for her, awaiting anxiously her comments, attempting vainly to fathom her emotions. But she said nothing.

“And the Principessa’s room?” said the Marchesa.

“I am occupying it myself,” said Galbraith. “It is cheerless enough; but if you wish to see it——”

“I’ll never be happy until I do.”

Galbraith had his hand on the latch when some-

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thing in Vittorio's pose caught his attention. Holding the candelabra well aloft he stopped and was looking intently at Mrs. Francis. Galbraith turned quickly and found her standing in the centre of the corridor, strikingly pale. Without saying a word he hastily opened the door and waved the Marchesa inside. In a flash he had realized that Mrs. Francis would not follow them. If Torrecella knew of Francesca Valdragone's piteous attempt to enter this room, surely did she, with perhaps more poignant detail.

The Marchesa's interest was soon allayed. She found the room the most cheerless she had ever entered.

"But where is Mrs. Francis?" she exclaimed. "We've lost her."

Galbraith hurried over his answer. "If you will wait here a moment I'll go fetch her."

He found her at the window of the corridor, looking out over the moon-flooded Campagna. Something in her attitude stopped him before he spoke, something in her bowed head, in a slight convulsive movement of her whole figure, and then,

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at last, in the sound that barely escaped her—a smothered sob.

He returned quickly to the Marchesa.

“Where is she?”

“Interested in a cabinet of old fans. She will follow us later.”

He kept her in the room as long as possible, he showed her everything, he even grew eloquent over a fresco he had never noticed before, for he was trying to gain time for the woman he loved.

When he could detain the Marchesa no longer they went back to the corridor. She was still standing there; still gazing out into the moonlight.

“I don’t believe you are tremendously interested in old houses,” said the Marchesa, slipping her arm through hers.

Galbraith awaited the sound of her voice. It was steady and calm. He had been able to spare her.

“I love old houses; they are like people to me. Sometimes, though, I feel as if we had no right to intrude upon their intimacy.” Then to Galbraith: “Shall we go back to the terrace?”

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When they were leaving, Galbraith broached a subject which he had in mind all evening,

"My lawyer tells me there is a very interesting experience in store for me day after tomorrow. I am to break the seals and open the Roman palace of the Valdragoni which has been closed since 1870."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed the Marchesa. "Is it to be a private view?"

Galbraith laughed. "I suppose so, though, as a matter of fact, I should prefer not doing it alone. I don't quite understand the feeling—but I dread it."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "One of those things you can't explain satisfactorily. When I arrived here I felt only indifference. I was bored with the whole matter. Now," his eyes shifted to Mrs. Francis, whom he found watching him closely, "now—I have a feeling of not wishing to delve any further into the past. I'd rather let it sleep peacefully."

He saw her open her lips to speak, then close

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them quickly. The words, whatever they were, remained unspoken.

"You are extraordinarily American in your lack of interest in your family," said the Marchesa.

"Isn't it rather my Italian sensitiveness coming to the surface?" He turned deliberately to Mrs. Francis. "I was wondering today, when I received the note from Torrecella telling me all arrangements had been made, if you and the Marchesa would not go with me."

The Marchesa clapped her hands with delight. "A thrilling idea! We'll go and protect you from the ghosts."

Mrs. Francis did not answer.

"And you?" Galbraith looked at her.

She smiled at him oddly. "You should see it alone. Think what it represents. We should rob it of its mystery."

"I don't want mystery. I've had too much of it already. Please come."

She put her hand into his and smiled. The answer was made without speaking.

XXI

SIGNOR TORRECELLA was enjoying his siesta. In many ways it was the most satisfactory part of his summer days in Rome. He was sure of sleeping heavily and dreamlessly during the heat of the day—a thing he was not at all sure of during the cool hours of the night—all the time from noon, at which he had his first repast—black coffee and a cigarette at eight could not be dignified with such a name—until four and often later. After this he arose refreshed, went to his club on the Corso, had an ice, and remained refreshed throughout the evening and late into the night when either roulette or baccarat made the hours speed by. This siesta was the only thing that made a Roman summer day possible; the wine cart drivers, the watermelon venders, the shopkeepers, everyone observed it in very much the same fashion as Signor Torrecella.

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But, alas, this day he was not to be permitted to enjoy his profound sleep, at least not up to the last moment when his eyes opened of their own accord. A gentle, timid knock awakened him. Quintilino, his man servant, stood at the door, his eyes and hands full of apologies.

Torrecella brought out a resonant collection of oaths. Ancient and modern gods were called upon to witness the unheard-of crime of awakening a man in the midst of his siesta.

Quintilino bowed quite to the ground. It was a lady—an English signora. She would accept no refusal. She had said she would sit in the salone until the Signor Avvocato awakened.

Torrecella sat up in bed and took the card offered him.

“Do you mean she is in the house?”

“Si Signore, and her motor is awaiting her below.”

Another round of pagan oaths as Torrecella put his feet to the floor. Quintilino tried to help him dress and was roundly chided for his pains. Everything went wrong; but everything would,

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with one rudely awakened from peaceful slumber. When he reached the salone his irritation had increased rather than diminished.

"Cara mia! What do you mean coming to my house in the middle of the day—in the middle of a summer day in Rome! It's unheard of! It's—it's indiscreet!"

The lady lifted a heavy veil.

"Nothing could be indiscreet with a veil like this. Besides, Anglo-Saxons can do such things without being compromised. You Romans excuse it on the ground of national madness."

"You are not Anglo-Saxon."

"I am thought to be."

"But—when it is found out that you are not?"

"Ah, that is what I have come to see you about. When I am found out!" She stopped and looked at her watch. "Will you go out with me?"

"In the middle of the day!"

"It is almost five o'clock. We can go up to the Castello dei Cesari and have tea."

"I hate tea — another one of your acquired foreign habits."

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"Then an ice—and afterwards a *caffè nero*—anything you wish."

With inexhaustible patience she finally persuaded him, actually got him into the sun and to her motor.

The day was clear and golden and intensely hot, but the atmosphere was light and a breeze was blowing straight from the sea. One could almost taste the salt in it. They motored along the river and began the ascent of the Aventine hill.

With her veil down, he could not see her face and her silence told him nothing. For a moment, in his darkened salone, when she had looked at him, he had caught a new expression in her eyes—agitation, excitement, something strange and disturbing—but exactly what, he did not know. And through the drive she offered no explanation.

They found a table on the terrace shielded from the sun and sat down. Immediately before them were the ruins of the Palatine Hill; to the left, Rome; to the right, the Appian Way made its monumental progress towards the Alban Hills; and, far away in the distance, rose the gaunt,

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skeleton-like Sabines. Already the lights were slanting and deepening in color.

She lifted her veil and threw it back over her hat, leaned her elbows on the table and with hands clasped gazed out across the city. Torrecella tasted his ice and waited.

"I wonder if you know how beautiful Rome is!"

"I have nothing to compare it with. I have seen no cities out of Italy."

"Then, of course, you haven't an idea how much more it is than any other place."

This was getting nowhere. Torrecella again resorted to his ice.

"I don't want to leave here."

"I thought you said you did not intend to."

"I did say that. But now—I must."

"Why?"

She was still looking away from him. Finally, with an apparent effort, and as though relinquishing some great desire, she turned to him.

"You know he is opening the Palazzo tomorrow!"

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Torrecella assumed surprise. "Who?"

"The Principe di Valdragone."

"Yes. He wrote me to have everything in readiness."

"He has asked me to go with him."

Torrecella smiled, a quiet, dismissing smile, which said she had naturally found a simple excuse for not accompanying him.

"I told him I would go with him."

This was too much. It was bad enough being awakened from delightful slumber, but after having been awakened to have impossible, utterly impossible ideas thrown at one!

"You cannot go with him. Don't you realize the danger! If he asks to see the portraits he is sure to recognize you from the one of his mother. It might be a portrait of you."

Her eyes puzzled him. When they gazed out over Rome they were full of vague tragedy; when they met his they were somehow almost hard in their determination.

"I want him to know who I am."

Torrecella's hands and shoulders went up.

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"I want him to know more than that; I want him to know my story."

He made a quick decision; he must humor her; persuasion must wait.

"Va bene. But why this sudden change?"

"It is his right."

"If he believes you dead——"

"He believes Francesca Valdragone dead."

"But——"

She unclasped her hands and laid them on his. Now her eyes were unmistakably soft and dim.

"Torrecella—he loves me."

Madonna Santissima! What was the matter with her now! Hadn't she had many men in love with her! She was too beautiful, too charming, too rich for a man to know her without falling in love with her. Surely it was no novelty to her!

She held up her hand, impatient. "I am in no mood for chaffing today."

But why take the mere fact that this American had seen her, talked to her, and fallen in love with her so seriously! Men were doing it every day. It was the nature of the sex to love. They would

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be miserable if they were not up to something of the sort. In a way it kept them out of mischief.

Her slow, indulgent smile was full of very deep affection. "My dear friend, when you wish, you can be the most sympathetic person in the world; when you do not wish to be, when you are dragged away from your siesta, you can be quite—the contrary."

Torrecella selected a cigarette from his case and lighted it. After several deep inhalations he answered her smile.

"I am always, in my heart, sympathetic with you, cara mia; but you bewilder my poor old brain. Perhaps I am getting old and can't keep up with you. I don't understand at all what you wish me to do; and do you know? I don't believe you do either. If you do, per l' amore di Dio, tell me. You say you want me to tell him who you are; you say you want me to tell him your story; you say he is in love with you. Ebbene. I promise to do all this for you; and yet, after I promise, you look no happier."

"What is there to make me happier?"

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Suddenly Torrecella's eyes gleamed. "Ah, por Bacco, now I begin to understand. You think that if I tell him everything he will not be willing to give you your rightful share in the property—perhaps the villa! Listen to me. You misjudge this American. I have studied him; I have watched him closely; I wager I can predict exactly what he will do." He was too absorbed in his own exposition to notice the downward, almost contemptuous curve of her lips. "When he knows who you are he will withdraw all claims to the property, he will present it to you, and then he will return to America. You will see."

Without replying, she rose and leaned over the balustrade and to all appearances was interested only in the changing lights.

"Am I not right?" Torrecella threw after her.

"No doubt you are," she answered dully, still with her back to him.

"You will see—tomorrow."

She nodded. "Yes, I shall see—tomorrow."

What was the matter with her now? If she insisted on standing with her back to him and

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answering only with a repetition of his words he would never, never, get at the truth of what was troubling her. Ah, if women, at least once in a while, could be like men, look you in the eye and state a fact! But that was an impossibility. One might just as well wish that the Tiber were a clear stream.

He lighted another cigarette. Some people came on to the terrace and ruined the beauty of the place by exclaiming over it in some harsh, unintelligible language. When they had gone she again took her place opposite him at the table and poured out a cup of tea. Her face—it may have been only the sunset glow—appeared slightly flushed; her voice was surely a bit unsteady.

“Torrecella—he has made me ashamed of myself.”

Arcipicchio! What was coming now!

“You and I have not treated him fairly. We have not been honest with him. We have been, what you would call, Machiavellian.”

“Whose suggestion was it, my lady?”

“It was mine. I assume the whole responsibil-

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ity. But that was before I knew him. If you had only opposed me! If you had only refused to aid and abet me, this would never have come about. Ah, Torrecella, is it true that there is no happiness for a Valdragone? Are we to be an eternally accursed race? Even now, I realize that he is to suffer, too—as all of us do—and this through me!” She pressed her long, slender fingers tightly together. “I told you that he had pretended to me that he was a friend of Valdragone; and I let him think that I suspected nothing. But a few days ago he came to me of his own accord, told me of his subterfuge and asked me to help him.”

“Help him! How?”

“In doing something in memory of Francesca Valdragone.”

“Then that is exactly what you wanted! It is of a piece with your own plan!”

She did not appear to have heard the interruption.

“It was like coals of fire! Do you not feel as I do? He, in his ingenuousness and honesty and freshness, he trusted us—and we—we have been

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deceiving him and leading him on. For what purpose? To our profit—to my profit! Tricksters, that is what we are! Common, vulgar tricksters!”

Torrecella raised his shoulders lightly. “You forget he is of a new world—we are of an old.”

Her head moved in refutation of such excuses. “And he has won. Just the mere fact that he will offer me the villa, offer me everything when he knows who I am, makes it impossible for me to accept it.”

“Then it will be lost to both! It will go to the Church! He will not keep it!”

Again she leaned forward and touched Torrecella's hand. “Cannot you forget for one moment that you are a lawyer? It is not the legal side that interests me now; it is the human. I am thinking of the reparation that I can make him and that, amico mio, is for you to make for me. Tell him my story. Tell it him exactly as it happened. Do not let your affection for me hide a single detail. I want him to know the full truth, so that, in the end, there will be no romance left. Do you understand?”

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Torrecella's fine eyes were wide and staring.
"Not one word."

"But you *must* see. I have no right to let him go on loving me. And there is only one way to stop him. That is to tell him everything."

Torrecella snapped his fingers. As a matter of fact he was growing a little impatient. "When a woman is as beautiful as you——"

"Again you argue from the old world. He is of the new. You are without ideals—he is made up of them. Now—do you see?"

The fine old Roman head wagged in bewildered negation.

"Then I can do no better. I must leave it so."

She picked up her gloves and began slowly drawing them on.

"I am sorry I disturbed your siesta," she began in lighter tone, "but I had to tell you this today. Tomorrow, when we meet in the Palazzo I shall leave you alone with him. That will be the moment for you to tell him. I think that is all. Shall I drive you to your club?"

He declined the invitation with the excuse that

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he would remain where he was and watch the sunset; and when she was gone he leaned his head on his hands and pondered deeply. In a vague way he felt that she had placed her future happiness in his hands, but in placing it there, she had withheld the certainty that was so vital a necessity to him. If he were to save her, if she wanted to be saved in that way, it was not the truth that must be told—at least not the whole truth. A part was all that was necessary. Yet she had said *everything*.

He sighed deeply. He was just as much in the dark as he had ever been; perhaps a bit more. Indeed, he supposed he always would be—when there was a woman in the case.

XXII

WHILE Galbraith breakfasted on the terrace an important looking carabinieri approached from the garden and bowed; but before he had had time to state his mission Vittorio had seen him and beckoned him out of hearing. In a few minutes Vittorio returned, alone, and stood before Galbraith, his head a little to one side, a gesture Galbraith had learned to interpret as meaning favors to be asked.

"Fire away, Vittorio. What is it?"

"I was wondering, Principino, if you would be so gracious as to go with Pasquarosa and me to the Municipio. We have been summoned. The trial of Mauda is to be held to-day."

Galbraith shook his head. "No, you are not going to involve me in your disgraceful affair. You remember, I advised you to pay Mario Cavallini of Montecomprati for the asinello. He is bound to win the case."

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Vittorio raised eyes and arms in protest. "Never so long as I draw a breath."

"How can you help yourself if the Sindaco decides against you?"

"He is a just man. He will not decide against us."

Galbraith shook his head dubiously. "I don't know so much about that. I'm sorry you would not take my advice. I can't see what you want with the asinello, anyway."

At this Vittorio burst into loud laughter. Hadn't the Principino an idea what he would do with the asinello? Why, he was going to sell her; that was it!

An hour later, while Galbraith was waiting for the motor which was to take him to Rome, he saw Vittorio and Pasquarosa leave the villa in what they evidently considered legal attire. Vittorio was in much worn brown corduroy with broad brimmed felt hat and blue sash; he was a fairly good reproduction of Mario Cavallini of Montecomprati. Pasquarosa was gorgeous in a voluminous skirt, an orange blouse, with several strings

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of huge coral and an impressive pair of gold earrings.

Galbraith smiled as they disappeared down the cypress avenue. How fond he had grown of them! How much a part of the place they were! And to think that his mother, too, had known them! He picked up the coral horn that hung from his watch-chain and looked at it affectionately. He raised it to his lips and again smiled. He was wishing it to carry good luck to Vittorio and Pasquarosa at their trial. He, too, had become almost as much a part of the place as the two servants. Wasn't he already using charms to ward off evil influences!

The discordant sound of a motor horn broke upon his reflection. He frowned. Just outside the gate was a symbol of everything the past weeks had made so vague—waiting to carry him away from his peacefulness into—what?

As the motor reached the brow of the hill, the beginning of the descent, Galbraith looked down over the wide sweeping stretches with the feeling that he was plunging deep into a world that was

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going to be momentous for him. The Campagna was fresh and sparkling in the clarity of early morning; every object was sharply outlined, clear-cut, distinct. A medieval fortress, now an impressive ruin, marked the brow of the hill; a solitary stone pine, aloof and calm, appeared to be the last bulwark which separated him from the known, left behind, and the unknown, spreading before him.

The motor paused a moment as if taking a long breath, then gently, noiselessly glided down the hill. The hillsides were smothered in emerald green vineyards; poppies splotted the roadside with their scarlet brilliance, almost disagreeably red, almost too suggestive of a bloodstained battlefield; for a short space asphodels held sway with melancholy dignity; a ruined tower rose abruptly out of a vineyard. At last a flat stretch of road unrolled in the distance, uneven, roughly paved, yet singularly beautiful in its bare loneliness. Far to the right the Sabine hills rose, skeleton mountains which might have been pale clouds. Suddenly, directly ahead, a huge line of magnificent arches sprang across the road; beyond them, across roll-

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ing meadows, towards the sea, a pageant of crumbling tombs held sway—the Appian Way. Then shabby suburban buildings bordered the road, ending abruptly as the Porta San Giovanni blocked the entrance to the city.

The gate once passed, the cool air of the hills was left behind. The breath of the city smote Galbraith in the face. The yellows of the buildings seemed to catch the fire from the sun and throw it back with renewed force. Yet despite this first impression of lost freshness, he felt a strange, gay warmth tingling through him. This was not the air of the country, of dark groves and luxuriant vines; it was much more than that. It throbbed with the life of people; it vibrated with racing blood; it was filled with curious, unfamiliar, intriguing scents; it was alive with dynamic force.

He dismissed the motor until that afternoon, lunched early, then called a cab and gave the driver some indefinite instructions. He did not care much where he went; his one idea was to get close to this city which was so much a part of him; he wanted to feel it; to be intimate with it; to breathe it deep

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into his being. How different from his arrival, a few weeks before. Then he knew nothing; now——

He gave himself up to the sensual warmth of the day. A graceful fountain, a Triton bearing aloft a huge sea-shell, cooled a piazza with a thin stream of spray; an obelisk blocked the end of a street of orange buildings; giant horse trainers raised their marble magnificence in the shadow of a Renaissance palace; a fragment of aqueduct formed the side of a block of buildings; a huge Moses presided over three jets of Felice water; an arched gateway formed a frame for a sweeping view of mountains; a mammoth flight of steps, radiant with flower vendors' stalls, led from heights to the level of the city; an historical wall invited one through its three openings into a grove where pines and ilex cast refreshing shadows; and on and on until a piazza, on the brow of a hill, called to him to stop and look down upon the city which had ruled the world.

He stood there a long time, listening, his ears straining, all his senses striving to get in touch

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with this more than city which lay there before him. And at last its voice rose and spoke to him, a voice made up, not of the dull roar of smoke-grimed, modern cities, of something much more penetrating and subtle—the overtones of centuries.

He had no idea how long he stood there; it must have been hours. When he turned away he found the cab a little way off, in the shade of a tree, both driver and horse sound asleep.

It was almost five o'clock, and his appointment was to meet the Marchesa and Mrs. Francis at tea and drive them to the Palazzo, where Torrecella would await them. He found them at the Castello dei Cesari, the Marchesa much fussed by the heat, Mrs. Francis as cool and fresh as if she were still sitting beside the fountain in the garden, though in her eyes Galbraith was quick to see repressed excitement.

"Today," he said, looking from her down to the Tiber and along its shores to the always culminating point — St. Peter's, "I made the acquaintance of Rome."

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"Did you find it a Ritz hotel surrounded by ruins?" asked the Marchesa.

Galbraith smiled and shook his head; he was not in vein for the Marchesa's chatter. His eyes sought Mrs. Francis'. "I think—I'm sure I heard her voice."

"Hers?"

"Aren't all cities feminine?"

"Not Rome—Rome has always been masculine—a virile male."

They drove slowly down the hill, skirted the Capitoline quarter of the town, passed the Palazzo Farnese, and turned into the narrow Via Giulia, where the motor stopped before a forbidding, deserted-looking palace. The windows were barred with rotting panels, though the main portal was open and encumbered with pieces of wood which had evidently just been torn away. A shabby portiere stood guard at the entrance.

Torrecella advanced from out the gloomy archway and glanced quickly at the ladies. It was obvious that he was surprised to find them accompanying Galbraith, and when he was presented to

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them, having bowed low in his courteous way, he remained a moment with his eyes dwelling intently upon Mrs. Francis. She met his glance steadily and Galbraith instinctively felt that she was endeavoring to conquer some opposition on his part.

Finally he turned to Galbraith. "I thought you were coming alone." There was the least suggestion of disapproval or perhaps disappointment in his voice. "Will the ladies enter the palace?"

Galbraith nodded, frowning upon the dreary façade. "A fairly miserable looking place!" he commented, as if speaking to himself. "I should call it a house of the dead."

Torrecella smiled oddly. "You must remember it has been closed for almost fifty years. Not a living soul has passed under this archway since the Principessa left Rome." He turned to two men who stood a little way from him. "These gentlemen have accompanied me to make a report upon the conditions we find here. Shall we enter now?"

Torrecella led them through the archway into a damp, dark courtyard which apparently the sun-

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light never entered. The scent of dank, moldy walls struck them in the face; there was something sinister, ominous, unhealthy in the atmosphere of the place; the bright sunlight without suddenly seemed miles away; even the heat of the summer day was now a distant memory.

They began the ascent of the wide, Travertine staircase. The third turn brought them to a large door, the frame of richly carved marble, the panels of heavy walnut studded with nails. Across the large lock were tied heavy cords, each bearing a red seal.

Torrecella signaled to one of the men to cut the cords and then drew from his pocket a key. He turned to Galbraith and placed the key in his hand.

"I think you are the one to open this door," he said with a dignity which made the moment important.

Galbraith put the key in the lock, turned it and pushed the door open. A vast entrance hall confronted him. He moved to one side and motioned to the ladies to enter. The Marchesa pretended to

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shiver and hold back; Mrs. Francis appeared to be unconscious that he had spoken.

"I shouldn't be the first to enter for anything in the world," cried the Marchesa. "I already feel the presence of terrible deeds and unknown crimes. No, Principe di Valdragone, you must go first. If the ghost appears it is your duty to confront it. Besides, it will surely have something to say to you that we ought not to hear."

Galbraith gave a short laugh and entered the hall. It was vast in its proportions; the ceiling was up the height of two floors; frescoes, as bright as when first painted, decorated the walls; a stone fireplace filled one end of the room; superb tapestries fell from the ceiling to the floor; an extraordinary long table extended the length of the hall. It was a chamber of exceptional dignity. Even a meagre imagination would easily have filled it with a gorgeous assembly of people, wonderful costumes, personages, cardinals, damasks, brocades, lights, perfumes, everything that goes with pageantry and those days long past. Even the baldachino with its parasol and throne chair spoke

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of the days when popes came personally to visit their more favored satellites.

Another sealed door, once opened, invited inspection; and on and on, one room after another, with only a change in decoration to offer variety, until an octagonal ball room ended the perspective. Here the walls were covered with portraits shrouded in cloth which showed the dust of years; the floor was a lugubrious arrangement of black and white marble slabs; three windows and a door filled symmetrically four sides of the room.

Torrecella gave orders to one of the men to open the windows. Once more the sunlight and a view of the Tiber just beneath the windows! A sigh of relief went up from almost each one present.

"Now I am no longer afraid of the ghost," exclaimed the Marchesa. "He wouldn't dare show himself in such blazing sunlight. Neither should I," she added, retreating from the searching glare.

Galbraith, walking beside her, was conscious of the fact that Mrs. Francis and Torrecella had drawn a little away from them. The sound of

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their voices no longer reached him, though, when he turned he found them standing close together and looking at a roll of manuscript which the lawyer appeared to be explaining to her.

"This is a catalogue of the portraits," Torrecella explained to Galbraith, coming across to him. "The men are here to uncover any of those you would like to see, if," he added tentatively, "you wish to see them today."

"Is there a portrait of my mother?"

Torrecella glanced at the manuscript and called to the men and indicated a number. In a few minutes the picture was revealed, a full length portrait of a young woman in a costume of the late sixties, standing beside a table on which was a vase of white lilacs.

Galbraith looked at it a long time without speaking. That evening in the garden, when his thoughts had begun to turn for the first time about his mother, came back to him, and with it the yearning that he had then felt. He resented the fate which had separated him from the sweet, beautiful face which now smiled down upon him.

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How strangely familiar she seemed. He felt that he had known her; that the features, the calm, sweet curve of the lips; the slim, delicate arms, and that blending of gentleness and great dignity had always been known to him. There was nothing unfamiliar in her personality. It was as though he had lived in daily contact with her. The sensation deepened as he stood there, forgetting that he was not alone. What was this strange tie that was so touchingly alive!

Suddenly he became conscious of a presence beside him. It was Mrs. Francis gazing at the portrait with the same intensity. His glance shifted from the portrait to her and the feeling of familiarity grew even stronger. She, too, so near him, suddenly appeared familiar. Could he have known her before also!

In the meantime the Marchesa had braved the strong sunlight for the sake of the cooling breeze that came through the open window; as a matter of fact her interest in old palaces was being somewhat subdued by the heat of the June afternoon.

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"Which particular ancestor are you unveiling?" she called to them.

"The Prince of Valdragone's mother."

The Marchesa's interest revived sufficiently to carry her across the room to Galbraith's side.

"Your mother! What did she——" She stopped abruptly and put her face-à-main. "Why, it's the most extraordinary thing I've ever seen! It might be a picture of Mrs. Francis."

Galbraith did not hear her. His eyes remained fastened on the picture; then, slowly, they closed; he even swayed a bit as the blinding realization swept over him. It seemed to him now that he had known it always. It was all so perfectly clear—her interest in the family, her knowledge of it, Torrecella's visit to her in the night, her return to the scene of her childhood! Good God!

"Don't you think it the image of her?" He heard the Marchesa's voice as from a long distance. "But—where is she?"

Again Galbraith heard a voice coming from a great distance; this time it was Torrecella's.

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"She has gone. She asked me to say she would not wait."

The Marchesa gasped. "Gone! Where has she gone!"

"She only said she must leave."

The Marchesa gathered up her skirts and prepared to leave. "She is probably waiting in the motor. I shall look for her there. She has probably had enough, as I, of this dead atmosphere. It is suffocating." She went towards the door. "I shall await you below," she said, with a mock curtesy to Galbraith, who was paying no attention at all to her, "when you come out of that ancestral trance."

Suddenly Galbraith caught hold of Torrecella's arm. "Go with her, please. Tell her not to wait for me. Tell her I shall not return to the villa tonight. Tell her anything; I want to be alone—yes, quite alone. If you will leave the portiere at the door with the keys—thank you. Yes—I wish to remain here—quite by myself."

Left alone, he sank down on a chair and covered his face with his hands; and while he sat there the

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Tiber turned to burning gold, the dome of St. Peter's changed from turquoise to pale rose, the heights of Monte Mario grew dark with shadows, and the room in which he sat alone became vague in the onrushing darkness,

XXIII

A SLIGHT noise broke the stillness. Galbraith looked up. Torrecella stood before him.

During the first moments in which he stood there Galbraith did not notice that the old lawyer's face was strangely old and lined, nor that in his eyes was the haunted, suffering look of a helpless, dumb creature.

He extended his hands as though in apology for the interruption. "I came back—because she sent me."

Galbraith started. "Where is she?"

"Gone."

Gone! The word rang across the shadowed room with ominous meaning. Then, once more the silence of the deserted palace, the vague, stilled words of the past crowded up close.

"Signor Principe—she sent me to you."

"She! Why?"

"To tell you—everything."

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Suddenly Galbraith rose and crossed to the window. He wanted fresher air than this room of the dead offered. The moment he had been dreading through the past hour had come. He knew that he must face it now—or later. But why face it at all? The unknown did not exist. Why not let it remain unknown forever! Ah, in that lay happiness; in the other—perhaps shipwreck. Why hesitate! Why not make the decision now and forever!

“Torrecella, you told me once. I ask you no more questions now. I know all I wish to know. I love her. That is enough.”

The old lawyer's answer came in trembling inflection. “She loves you too, Principe. She has not said it; but that is not always necessary. It is something one knows better when it is unspoken. Is it not so?” He waited to see Galbraith's face before he continued, but only an expressionless back confronted him. “It is because of her love for you that she sent me to you.” Again, a long, fruitless pause. “If she had not cared it would have made no difference to her if you knew or not.”

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"It can make no difference now. I have said that I do not wish to know anything. I am satisfied."

"She is not."

"Then let her tell me."

"That is impossible. She is leaving to-morrow."

Galbraith whirled and faced him. "Where is she going?"

"Away from Italy—forever."

Galbraith was already half across the room. "I shall go to her now."

"It is useless, Principe. She will not see you—until you know everything."

Torrecella saw him stop short, stand perfectly still a few moments, then come back to the window and gaze out into the dusky twilight. Did his silence mean a relinquishing of opposition? Did it mean acceptance of the inevitable? The tried and trusted friend of years drew a long breath. Everything that had gone before seemed suddenly to assume importance, to explain itself as a preparation for this moment. Every little incident in

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the life of this unhappy family was at his fingertips to use at this crucial moment; and yet he hesitated; he even thought of accepting Galbraith's insistence upon ignorance and leaving it at that. But such hesitation was only of moments. He crossed himself. Might the Madonna help him! In his hands lay the fate of the last two members of the Valdragoni. If there was a way towards happiness for them, let him help them find it!

"Signor Principe — you must remember — she was only sixteen—a mere child—a baby. And she was desperately unhappy. You see, I had known her since she was so high—in her father's palace near the Palazzo Montecavallo. I went there every week to see her father and each time she was brought into Don Claudio's room to greet me. We were friends then. Ah, the beginning of that friendship! It is more than friendship; it is love I feel for her, as deep as Don Claudio's could have been. She knows it. It was that which counseled her in her hour of despair. It was that which brought her straight to me . . .

"When her father and mother died it was I who

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took her to the convent in Florence. The Principessa would not even see her. And in the three years that followed I always went there to see her in March, at her festa, the feast of Santa Francesca. And each time I saw her she begged me to take her away with me. The sadness of the convent made her more and more unhappy each year . . .

"The night she came to my house in Rome! Dio mio—shall I ever forget it! It was past midnight. I had gone to bed. The portiere had been aroused by the knocking and had refused her entrance. But her insistence and her tears won. He awakened me and asked me what he should do. When I found her in the cold entrance hall, pale as death, dry-eyed, with a dignity that was tragic, I knew at once that the curse of the Valdragoni had sought her out and chained her. It was hardly necessary for her to tell me anything . . .

"She had been away from the convent a week, lured thence by a man she had met at a school-mate's house. His courtship had been quick and successful. In two meetings he had persuaded

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her to escape with him and go with him to his castle where he would marry her. What does a child of sixteen know of the world? She was fascinated, she asked no questions, she fled with him to his castle in Umbria where one of his henchmen, disguised as a priest, performed a mock marriage. Before the end of the week she was told by one of the women attending her that the man she thought her husband was already married. She would not believe it until he, the beast, laughingly admitted it. She did not hesitate a moment. She left his castle within the hour, came straight to Rome and out to the villa. She got as far as the Principessa's room—the story had preceded her from the convent—and was turned back, driven out of the house into the night, driven out into the world alone . . .

“Then she remembered me and came to me, that night, straight from the villa. I was the only one left in the world for her to turn to; the only one in the whole world who she knew would not forsake her . . .

“I took her to my sister who was a nun in a

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convent on the Cœlio. I left her there. Then I went out to the Principessa. I besought her to have pity, to take the child to her heart; if not that, to at least protect her. She refused. There had never been a woman among the Valdragoni who had had a breath of scandal connected with her name. It was the curse of her Piedmontese mother. She would not relent. She would from that moment deny the existence of her granddaughter. She was already dead to her."

"A month later my sister came to me. The child could no longer remain in the convent. She was expecting a little baby. . . ."

"I carried her far away into the country and hid her there with a peasant family. There the baby was born and lived a month. . . ."

"Again I went to the Principessa and begged her to relent. After much argument I got two concessions from her. If the child would go away, far away, out of Italy, renounce all right to inheritance, promise never to come back, she would give her an allowance and grant her one request—permit the baby to be buried, though without a

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name, in the Campo Santo where the Valdragoni are buried. . . .”

“There was nothing else the poveretta could do. She accepted the offer. I went with her to the little Campo Santo and we stood there together while her little baby was put beneath the ground; then, that night, we left for Switzerland where I found a place for her to live.”

“In Geneva she met an English woman who a year later adopted her and gave her her name—and later left her a fortune. When she took this woman’s name, the letter was written announcing her death. From that moment, Francesca Valdragone, to the Principessa and to the world, was dead. . . .”

“Signor Principe—I have told you everything. . . .”

XXIV

GALBRAITH motored back in the early evening, leaving Rome behind him in the June dusk. With eyes only towards the blue line of Alban Hills, the Campagna slipped past him unnoticed—as silent and tragic as himself.

The portiere threw the gates open and bowed ceremoniously.

“Excellency,” he said, “I have just received a message from Vittorio. The trial has continued all day and is not yet finished. He will return the moment he is released. As there is no one at the villa will Your Excellency dine in the village, at the trattoria, perhaps. I can go ahead and order dinner now.”

Galbraith, hardly hearing the man, shook his head. No, he would go on to the villa alone. He was glad there was no one there. It was exactly as he wished it. Let no one disturb him; he wished to be alone.

Again the avenue of cypresses—grave and

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solemn! Again the little white casino in the grove of magnolia trees! Again the sound of wings surging about him and pressing down upon him! Again the past—hideous, cruel, relentless!

How apart from her life this day in Rome had made him! How trivial, meaningless, insipid his own existence, beside hers, had been! She had lived and suffered and passed through the furnace; he had merely existed. Even now——

Torrecella had said she loved him. But Torrecella was imaginative—and old. Why should he mean anything at all to her! And tomorrow she was going away forever!

He stopped and turned back. He went slowly through the gloom until he stood before the house that sheltered her. He stopped before the gate. Within, somewhere, she was living at that moment.

Suddenly his hand clutched the bell chain and pulled it.

The English maid, with an expression that poorly masked surprise, let him in and conducted him to the pergola outside the salone. She would ask if her mistress could see him.

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A small table placed on the stone pavement was set for dinner; vines with clusters of small green grapes hung in festoons from beams of the pergola; a bowl of lilacs decorated the table; beautiful linen, shining silver, and a fiasco of wine—the red wine of Tuscany—were all at that moment symbols which crushed in upon Galbraith's imagination.

He waited, interminably. At last the sound of footsteps smote his ears; then the soft, almost noiseless swishing of a gown; and then he knew that she was near him, almost beside him. Yet he dared not look at her. The moment was one of culminating agony for him. After he had once met her eyes the terror would be passed; but until then——

“You asked to see me?”

He nodded, speechless, still not looking at her. She waited.

“Why?”

His glance traveled slowly from the hem of her skirt to her hands and stopped there. Finally he took them in his own. How cold they were!

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Suddenly he knelt down and covered them with kisses.

"I love you. I love you."

Leaning over him, she released her hands from his and placed them on each of his temples and turned his face up towards hers.

"Look at me."

Their eyes met.

"You say you love me."

"I shall be saying it all the days, the moments, of my life."

She smiled—the smile of the little girl, Torrella would have called it—and then her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"What is it?" he asked, quickly troubled.

For a long time, at least it seemed so to him, she looked away from him and out into the gathering night. It was the same expression he had noticed before, the expression that made him feel that, to reach him, she had to come across the world he did not know, her world, the one in which he had played no part.

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She spoke again. "Torrecella told you everything?"

Galbraith nodded. "But I did not ask. I did not want to listen. I did not want to hear anything except from your lips. I knew enough already—that I loved you. That is all I need know."

"That you loved me!" She barely stressed the tense.

"That I love you—that I do love you now—more than ever before."

"Ah!"

She covered her face with her hands and swayed so that he thought she was going to fall. He put out his hands to her.

"Nothing makes any difference to a man when he loves as I do," he rushed on. "Nothing—except that you have suffered—that you have been alone—that I came too late—that——" He stopped abruptly and brushed his hand across his eyes as though something had suddenly obscured his vision and he wished to rid himself of it. "Nothing matters—unless——"

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She was looking at him again through tear-dimmed eyes. "Unless?" she repeated.

"Unless I have really come too late; unless there is something that Torrecella did not tell me—something that you did not wish me to know—that you were too kind to wound me by telling."

Amazement quickly took the place of tears. "There is nothing that I do not wish you to know."

"Then—why did you come back to Italy?"

She put her hand gently on his arm and led him a little way across the pavement to where, through an opening in the tress, they could see, in the luminous night light, the olive covered slope of the hills crowned at the summit with the little Campo Santo.

She raised her hand and indicated the spot.

"My little baby is buried there. . . . All through the past eight years my heart has been there. . . . Ah, the longing to come back to that little square of ground! I continually thought of myself as a deserter, a coward, an inhuman mother without a heart—to leave my baby there all alone. . . . How lonely she

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must have been! No one to bring her flowers—no one to sit beside her when night was coming on—no one to sing her to sleep. . . . The moment I could come, I came.”

Galbraith bowed his head. “That is all I wanted to know. You have told me. Thank you.”

She drew away her hand though her eyes still searched his under troubled brows.

“What else could there have been?”

He drew back; yet her waiting demanded an answer.

“Some one else.”

Her eyes fell and the color rushed into her face. Galbraith’s heart stopped beating. Was this then to be the end of all happiness for him! The moments became dreary hours. His waiting was endless. Then, with her voice, he caught the accent of gentle reproach.

“*You* ask me that?”

“I—I had to.”

“Then—you don’t know what the past weeks have been to me—since you came into my life—

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since you have come back into my life—since, in merely watching you and knowing you, everything has once more become beautiful to me.” She stopped and brushed away some tears. “I am just beginning to live. The world is just beginning to be what I had always hoped it would be. Before you came it was only existence—sad existence with bitter memories. Nothing that has gone before seems real to me now.”

Galbraith drew in his breath with quick relief.

“Please — please say nothing more. I am ashamed that I ever asked you.”

She shook her head and smiled, ever so gently.

“I am glad you asked me; I am glad that I have answered you. Nothing means anything to me now but that you love me. What a day of suffering! How I waited and listened for you to come! If you had not come, if you had gone on to the villa and not come here to me, do you know what I should have done?”

He held out both arms to her. She came to him.

“I don’t want to know. Don’t let’s mar our

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happiness with vague conjecture. Let's be happy."

She raised her hand, smiled into his eyes, and made the sign of the horns. "In spite of the fact that we are both Valdragoni."

He kissed her hand and straightened out the fingers. "A plague on the Valdragoni!"

XXV

"I VENTURE to say that Cincinnatus and Hannibal and all the rest of them hiding in these shadows are green with envy."

"Unheard of people—according to Vittorio," she smiled back at him.

They were dining at the table which had been laid for one, the clusters of young green grapes hanging down within reach, the flask of the red wine of Tuscany empty.

"I don't believe a single thing has happened since I came that you do not know."

"Isn't that flattering?"

Galbraith debated this. "I'm not so sure. I might have done many things differently—if I had known."

They saw a lantern moving along the driveway and go on in the direction of the villa. Galbraith peered through the foliage and recognized the two figures.

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"Vittorio and Pasquarosa. Shall we go to them? I am afraid they have lost their suit. Their steps did not have the conquering air."

"You go. I shall join you later in the upper garden."

He found Vittorio and Pasquarosa in the kitchen, facing each other through what appeared an ominous silence. Even Galbraith's entrance elicited nothing more than a perfunctory greeting; and their attitudes were neither conquering nor beaten.

"Well," he questioned, "what's the matter? Trial not finished yet?"

"Si, Principino, it is finished."

"And the Sindaco's verdict?"

Here Pasquarosa stepped forward.

"That is the question, Principino. We do not know what the Signor Sindaco meant."

"What did he say?"

"Listen, Principino. After Vittorio had spoken, after I had spoken, and after Mario Cavalini, of Montecomprati, had spoken, the Signor Sindaco went out of the room with the two avvocati. That

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was about four o'clock, Principino. At seven I wanted to come home—I knew that the Principino would return and there would be no dinner and I sent word to the Signor Sindaco that I could not wait. And what do you think his answer was, Principino! That I could not leave and that the Principino, if he were hungry, could dine very well at the trattoria in the Piazza! Che mal educato!"

"Well, go on; what next?"

Vittorio advanced. "At nine o'clock, Principino, the Signor Sindaco and the two avvocati came out of the private room. They were laughing, Principino."

"About what?"

"That is what we do not know."

"But they rendered a decision."

"Si, si, Principino, they did that."

Galbraith's patience was nearing an end. "In the name of heaven—what did they say?"

"They said, Principino, that the asinello belonged to Mauda."

Galbraith tried to keep his face straight.

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"I congratulate you both. I had no idea you would win."

They turned and faced each other, more bewildered than ever. Did the Principino think that was what the Signor Sindaco meant?

"I am sure of it."

"Then La Seconda is ours!" came from both at the same time.

"No, she is not yours at all—she's Mauda's."

Down went Vittorio's face.

"Then I cannot sell her?"

"Not without selling Mauda."

Pasquarosa turned and emptied a large quantity of maccheroni into a pot of boiling water. "The law is very strange, Principino."

XXVI

A LIGHT breeze had sprung up and was stirring gently through the ilex grove; with it came a great red moon, over the Alban Hills. The tall gaunt cypresses sprang up clear cut against the sky and the cascade, until this moment unseen, became a delicate web of silver against a sombre background.

Once more Galbraith heard the sound of unseen wings. They came closer and closer; they surrounded him; they became voices now. He no longer dreaded them; he nodded and answered them; he held out his arms to them; more than that he smiled upon them. They had brought him his great happiness.

The garden grew brighter and more luminous. It was exactly now as though he were walking in the soft light of some ideal world. He waited a long time—it must have been years—then he saw her coming slowly up the steps. How perfectly

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like his first vision of her! The crumbling lichen-covered steps; the wall festooned with pink geranium—a delicate assembly of old grays and moss greens and fresh pinks, pastel in softness; the varnished gloom of the ilex grove; the pure black of silent cypresses; the glory of the radiant heavens! . . . Yes, a perfectly chosen setting; and in it, a part of it, she in a white gown, a simple, fresh, fragrant summer frock, a sprig of yellow roses at her waist, a scarf of old lace, a bit yellowed, thrown about her shoulders. She stopped. She lifted her face and sought a voice that had called to her, and, finding it, smiled. It was such a lovely smile, slow, caressing and so very, very sweet. It changed her like magic into a young girl. Had he thought her a woman! He was entirely wrong. She was only a child.

Was he dreaming! He rubbed his hand across his eyes. No—surely she was there—just as he had seen her that first day—and talking to someone hidden within a window. He came a step nearer. Ah, now he was sure it was no dream. He recognized Pasquarosa's voice.

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"Signora, he has come—the Principino!"

This time her smile did not fade; she came a step nearer.

"When?"

"This evening—from Rome."

"Where is he?"

"He has gone into the garden."

She looked up the steps, not at all as though meditating flight, but as if searching for someone.

"Pasquarosa"—this even more eagerly—"what is he like?"

No dubious silence followed the question.

"Pasquarosa thinks——"

"Yes?"

"The Principino is an angel."

"But what does he look like—in the face?"

"He is beautiful—like all the Valdragoni. But why does the Signora ask? He has been to see her. He spent an hour with her in the casino only a few days ago. Does not the Signora find him simpatico?"

The Signora nodded. Yes—she did; in fact—so much so—— She came even one more step

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nearer the window. Galbraith had to strain his ears to listen.

"Will you guard my secret well, Pasquarosa?"

Pasquarosa crossed herself, raised her eyes to heaven and made the assertion that a secret told her was more safely guarded than if buried in the Campo Santo.

"Then, Pasquarosa, I find him so simpatico—as you put it—that I am going to become his wife and go with him across the great ocean to his new country—America."

An ominous silence followed the statement. Then came Pasquarosa's voice and a sob.

"Forever?"

"No—no. We could never leave here forever."

Again the ominous silence. "Signora—I said I could guard your secret well. I lied. I am Vittorio's wife. I cannot keep it from him."

Then, evidently forsaken by Pasquarosa, she came on up the steps and directly towards Galbraith.

"Eavesdropper! Were you satisfied this time?"

"My head's completely turned round."

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She laughed softly. "The whole world is—for me."

Meanwhile Pasquarosa was crossing the Piazza in the direction of the Duomo. A candle bought and lighted, she made her way to the chapel of the Virgin, her favorite Virgin, the one who wore the red robe embroidered with grapes and wheat, and placed the candle at her feet.

"Holiest and most glorious Virgin," she prayed, "Pasquarosa has come to Thee with a heavy heart. Two Valdragoni are wedding each other—a strange proceeding, is it not, Holiest of Mothers!—even if they love each other, as I have reason to believe. But more than that, they have so little sense that they are risking their lives to cross the great ocean and go into a new and wild country. O, Madonna Santissima, watch over them, protect them, intercede for them!—and fetch them safely back to Vittorio and Pasquarosa, thy old and poor and faithful servants. Amen."

